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ABSTRACT

This document comprises three booklets that serve as a foundation for understanding the cultural diversity and values of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese students. Each booklet reviews the country's history and geography. "Introduction to Cambodian Culture" (S. Chhim) discusses the following topics: (1) the Khmer concept of individual worth; (2) the family; (3) the language system; (4) the education system; (5) religion; (6) art forms and expression; (7) literature, the performing arts, and crafts; (8) important ceremonies; (9) holidays and festivals; and (10) recreation and leisure. "Laos Culturally Speaking" (K. Luangpraseut) discusses the following topics: (1) the Lao and their universe; (2) the concept of a human being; (3) the perception of human life; (4) the life circle; (5) important ceremonies; (6) major holidays and festivals; (7) family structure; (8) living conditions; (9) wisdom versus knowledge; (10) literature; and (11) the Lao and the outside world. "Introduction to Vietnamese Culture" (H. D. Te) discusses the following topics: (1) man in relation to himself; (2) man in relation to family and society; (3) language and nonverbal communication; (4) politics and economics; (5) nature; (6) values; (7) the education system; (8) religion; (9) philosophy of life; and (10) language as an expression of the individual's relationship to himself and the outer world. Each booklet includes a bibliography and appendixes. Four maps, one chart, and three illustrations are also included. (FMW)

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INTRODUCTION to CAMBODIAN CULTURE

by Sun-Him Chhim

LAOS CULTURALLY SPEAKING

by Khamchong Luangpraseut

INTRODUCTION to VIETNAMESE CULTURE

by Huynh Dinh Te

Multifunctional Resource Center,
San Diego State University
1989 (second printing)

Foreword

This book consolidates three publications that serve as a foundation for understanding the cultural diversity and values of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese students. Of importance is the awakening of our consciousness to the social forces faced by refugee children entering and attending schools in the United States. We have data to indicate that in the next decade the educational needs of refugee children in our nation will continue to grow. How we enable these children to become active participants in our school communities, is an essential responsibility that we face in our work.

This publication entitled *Introduction to the Indochinese and Their Cultures (Introduction to Cambodian Culture, Laos Culturally Speaking, and Introduction to Vietnamese Culture)* was made possible through the support of Dr. Van Le, Coordinator of the Transition Program for Refugee Children (TPRC) housed in the Bilingual Education Office of the California State Department of Education. The authors, Mr. Sun-Him Chhim, Mr. Khamchong Luangpraseut, and Dr. Huynh Dinh Te, respectively provide an insightful overview of the Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese cultures.

This booklet is one of a series in English focusing on the Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese cultures. The intent is to increase the level of awareness and understanding of school district instructional personnel about the values and beliefs the students from these cultures bring to the school setting. At a personal level as educators we need to increase our knowledge and awareness of Indochinese cultures in order to provide equal educational opportunity to all Indochinese students.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Dr. Van Le, Mr. Xuan Tran, and Ms. Judy Lewis, for all of their efforts and valuable assistance in the completion of this publication.

The San Diego State University Multifunctional Resource Center is thankful for the opportunity to have assisted in this endeavor. We are hopeful that this publication will contribute towards a better understanding of the cultural background of the Southeast Asian students presently enrolling in our schools and enriching our nation.

Alberto M. Ochoa, Chairperson
Policy Studies Department
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Acknowledgements

This second printing of the three booklets of the "Indochinese Cultures" series, previously published by the Multifunctional Resource Center, San Diego State University in 1987, combines the separate volumes into a single book.

The original booklets were quickly exhausted by the warm welcome of educators and other persons working with Southeast Asian people. We have decided, therefore, to do a second printing to meet the unfulfilled requests by libraries, educational research centers and institutions of higher learning.

Originally this series was developed through an ESEA Title IV-C grant by the Orange County Superintendent of Schools Office. Unfortunately, the grant to develop these materials was discontinued a year before the project was to end. Considering the importance of these critically needed materials, we requested and received permission from the Orange County Superintendent of Schools office to allow the completion of the series through the use of California State Transition Program for Refugee Children (TPRC) special funds with the assistance of the San Diego State University Multifunctional Resource Center for publication and dissemination.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Orange County Superintendent of Schools office for the initial efforts in developing these materials. In particular, we wish to thank Dr. Vu Duc Chang, Dr. Nathanial Lamm, and Dr. Gilbert Martinez. Additional words of appreciation go to the following people:

Introduction to Cambodian Culture:
Mr. Sun Him Chhim, author
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Introduction to Vietnamese Culture:
Dr. Huynh Dinh Te, author
Mrs. Thai N. Strom, cover illustrator.

In addition, thanks go to Mrs. Judy Lewis and Mr. Lue Vang for their valuable assistance in the final preparation of the manuscript for this second printing.

We hope that this series will contribute towards a better understanding of the cultural background of the Southeast Asian students presently enrolled in our schools.

Van LE, Consultant
TPRC State Coordinator
Bilingual Education Office
State Department of Education
Spring 1989.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to Cambodian Culture

Chapter I. The Physical Setting 5
MAP: Cambodia (Khmer Republic) 8
Chapter II. The Historical Setting 9
Chapter III. The Khmer Concept of Individual Worth 20
Chapter IV. The Family 23
Chapter V. The Language System 27
Chapter VI. The Education System 30
Chapter VII. Religion 34
Chapter VIII. Art—Art Forms and Expression 39
ILLUSTRATION: Pin Pead *Orchestra* 43
ILLUSTRATION: Marriage Orchestra 45
ILLUSTRATION: Chayan Band 47
Chapter IX. Literature—Performing Arts—Crafts 48
Chapter X. Important Khmer Ceremonies 52
Chapter XI. Khmer Holidays and Festivals 55
Chapter XII. Recreation and Leisure 58
Appendix 64
Bibliography 70

Laos Culturally Speaking

Introduction, Introduction, Introduction 75
Chapter I. Lao, Laos, Laotians 78
CHART: Laos, Indochina, Southeast Asia 84
MAP: Major Ethnic Groups in Laos 85
Chapter II. The Lao and their Universe 91
Chapter III. The Lao Concept of a Human Being 97
Chapter IV. The Lao Perception of a Human Life 100
Chapter V. The Lao Life Circle 107
Chapter VI. Important Lao Ceremonies 111
Chapter VII. Major Lao Holidays and Festivals 113
Chapter VIII. The Lao Family Structure 117
Chapter IX. The Lao and their Living Conditions 121
Chapter X. Wisdom versus Knowledge 124
Chapter XI. The Lao Literature 128
Chapter XII. The Lao and the Outside World 131
Selected Bibliography 135

Introduction to Vietnamese Culture

Chapter I. The Physical and Historical Setting of Vietnamese Culture 138
APPENDIX 1: Synopsis of Vietnamese History 142
MAP: Nam Viet as of 211 B.C. 147
MAP: Formation of Vietnam (939-1780) 148
Chapter II. Man in Relation to Himself 149
APPENDIX 2: What's Your Name? 152
Chapter III. Man in Relation to Others: Family Relationships 156
Chapter IV. Man in Relation to Others: Wider Social Relationships 160
APPENDIX 3: "You" and "I" in Vietnamese 162
Chapter V. Man in Relation to Others: Language and Non-Verbal Communication 165
APPENDIX 4: Vietnamese Segmental Phonemes 172
APPENDIX 5: English and Vietnamese Language Structure Differences 174
APPENDIX 6: Vietnamese Writing 177
Chapter VI. Man in Relation to Others: Political and Economic Dimensions 178
APPENDIX 7: Têt, the Vietnamese New YearFestival 185
Chapter VII. Man in Relation to Nature 193
Chapter VIII. Man in Relation to Values 196
Chapter IX. Man in Relation Values: Education System 199
APPENDIX 8: Elementary Education 205
APPENDIX 9: Secondary Education, 1st Cycle 206
APPENDIX 10: Secondary Education, 2nd Cycle 207
APPENDIX 11: School System in Vietnam 208
Chapter X. Man Facing his Destiny: Religion in Vietnam 209
Chapter XI. Man Facing his Destiny: The Vietnamese Philosophy of Life 214
APPENDIX 12: The Cult of the Ancestors 217
Chapter XII. Man's Expression about his Relations to Himself and to Outer World 221
Selected Bibliography 227

SUN-HIM CHHIM

INTRODUCTION
to
CAMBODIAN CULTURE

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Chapter I

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

Cambodia, or Kampuchea, is a country about the size of Washington state, located in mainland Southeast Asia. It is bounded on the east by Vietnam, on the north by Laos, on the west by Thailand, and on the south by the part of the Pacific Ocean known as the Gulf of Siam. It has been at the crossroads of ocean trade from both India and China, which is the origin of the term *Indochina*. During the colonial days, Cambodia was part of *French* Indochina, along with Vietnam and Laos (Thailand and Burma were *British* Indochina). Cambodia's population in 1970 was estimated at about 7,000,000, more populous than Laos, but less populous than Vietnam. In recent decades, Cambodia has been considered an underpopulated country with an underdeveloped economy.

TOPOGRAPHY

Cambodia's surface is generally sea level to 300 feet, with mountain ranges in the north and southeast. Three-quarters of the land consists of the flat plains of the Mekong River basin, as it flows from China and Laos towards Vietnam and the sea. This flat central area has few hills over 300 feet in elevation. The Elephant Mountains and the Cardamon Mountains, 6,000 feet at their highest, lie between the Mekong basin and the Gulf of Siam. The Dangkrek Mountains lie in the north, towards Laos, and averaging about 1600 feet above sea level. There are plateaus in the northeast area, separated from the Dangkrek Mountains by the Mekong Valley, which serves as the major communication route in mainland Southeast Asia.

CLIMATE, SOILS AND DRAINAGE

The climate of Cambodia has the monsoonal characteristics of south and southeast Asia. There are two seasons, the wet and the dry. The warm rainy season begins in May and lasts through October, while the dry cold season marks the remainder of the year. Temperatures are rather uniform all over the basin area with an average annual mean of around 77°F. The maximum mean is about 83°F, and the minimum mean about 72°F. Maximum temperatures of over 90°F are common and may rise to over 100°F just before the rainy season. Minimum temperatures below 50°F are rare.

The yearly rainfall in the Cambodian basin averages around 70 inches, but there is great variation from year to year, as seen in the recent years of severe drought. Rainfall is heaviest along the southwestern mountain range, which may receive up to 200 inches annually. The relative humidity is high at night throughout the year, normally in excess of 90 percent. During the daytime, it averages below 50 percent in the dry season and remains above 60 percent in the rainy season.

Cambodia's great "rice basket" is the rich alluvial soils around the Tonle Sap, the great lake in the center of Cambodia. These soils are replenished by the annual flooding of the Tonle Sap, and the periodic flooding of the Mekong River. The provinces around Phnom Penh and south are made up of these fertile soils. The second major type of soil, more widely distributed, is red and brown in color and highly weathered. In the lowland or in mountainous areas, these soils are mostly covered with forests, although in a few places they underlie savanna vegetation. Most of these soils have only moderate to low potential for agriculture. However, with fertilizers and proper management, they can be used for the production of food crops or commercial crops.

All of Cambodia is drained by the Mekong River system and the Tonle Sap. The Mekong River flows for over two thousand miles from the mountains in Southern China to the sea, and has about a fifth of its length passing through Cambodia. It has many tributaries, and it has always played a crucial role in Cambodian life. This river system provides water to irrigate Cambodia's rice fields, shelter for billions of fish, and, until the present time, served as transportation routes throughout the year.

The most important of the tributaries is the Tonle Sap River which connects the Mekong to Tonle Sap Lake. This unusual river changes the direction of its flow twice a year. The Great Lakes are very much expanded during the rainy season, covering nearly a seventh of Cambodia's surface. During the dry season this large reservoir shrinks to a tenth of its rainy season size. At this point, it is the richest fresh water fishing ground in the world.

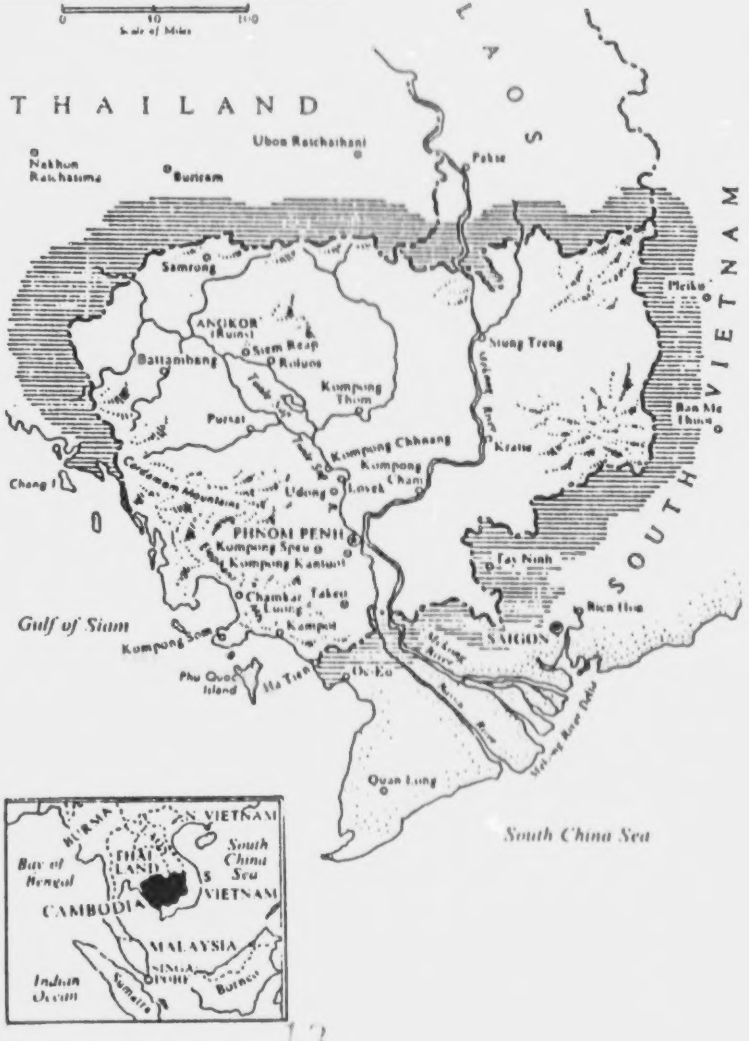
VEGETATION AND FAUNA

About 75 percent of Cambodia's land area is forested. The central lowland region is covered with rice paddies, fields of other dry crops (such as corn, bean, peanut or tobacco), expanses of tall grass and thinly wooded areas. Savanna is the prevailing vegetation of the transitional plains. The high plateaus of the eastern part are covered with deciduous forests and grasslands. In the mountainous areas to the north grow broadleaf evergreen forests with trees over 100 feet high emerging from thick undergrowths of vines, rattans, palms, bamboos and numerous woody and herbaceous ground plants. The southwestern ranges are covered with open forests of pines at higher elevations, while the rain-soaked seaward slopes are blanketed with impenetrable rain forests.

Growing wild or cultivated, the wide variety of fruits of Cambodia includes breadfruit, jackfruit, durian, mango, papaya, mangosteen, rambutan and bananas.

Cambodia is home to elephants, wild oxen, tigers, panthers, leopards, bears, and a large number of small game. Common birds are herons, cranes, grouse, pheasant, peacocks, pelicans, cormorants, and wild ducks. Many varieties of snakes are especially dangerous including the cobra, the king cobra, the banded krait, and Russell's viper.

CAMBODIA
(KHMER REPUBLIC)



0
50
100
Scale of Miles
THAILAND
LAOS
SOUTH VIETNAM
Ubon Ratchathani
Nakhon Ratchasima
Buriram
Pakse
Samrong
ANGKOR (Ruins)
Siem Reap
Battambang
Roluos
Kompong Thom
Stung Treng
Mekong River
Pleiku
Pursat
Tonle Sap
Kompong Chhnang
Kompong Cham
Kratie
Ban Me Thuot
Chong I.
Cardamom Mountains
Udong
Lovek
PHNOM PENH
Kompong Speu
Kompong Kantuot
Tay Ninh
Chamkar Luong
Takeo
Bien Hoa
Gulf of Siam
Kampot
SAIGON
Kompong Som
Mekong River
Phu Quoc Island
Ha Tien
Oc-Eo
Bassac River
Mekong River Delta
Quan Long
South China Sea
BURMA
N. VIETNAM
LAOS
THAILAND
South China Sea
Bay of Bengal
S. VIETNAM
CAMBODIA
MALAYSIA
SINGAPORE
Indian Ocean
Sumatra
Borneo

Chapter II

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

The importance of Cambodia's historical and cultural contributions to Southeast Asia is much greater than its presently much reduced, almost eliminated, territory and political power. At its highest point, from 11th to 13th centuries, the Khmer State stretched across a vast area of the Indochinese peninsula incorporating, besides present day Cambodia, the southern part of modern Vietnam, Laos and Thailand.

Tracing its roots back to the Kingdom of Funan, founded in the first century A.D., the rich history can be divided into six distinct periods: (1) Cambodia before the 9th century, (2) the Angkor period, (3) the decline, (4) the French control, (5) after World War II period, and (6) the Khmer Rouge era.

THE PERIOD BEFORE THE 9TH CENTURY

Archaeological study shows that parts of present Cambodia were inhabited by people of the Neolithic culture beginning in the second millennium B.C. Around the start of the Christian Era the inhabitants had developed relatively organized societies with civilization beyond the primitive stage.

Moving by land and sea routes from regions north of Indochina, migrants passed through the area in successive waves. The first group was composed of Australoid inhabitants followed by Melanesians and then by Indonesians. The languages spoken by the various groups were determined as having a common distant origin, the dominant tongue being the Mon-Khmer. The present day Khmer or Cambodian language is the direct derivative of the then Mon-Khmer.

Little is known about human life in the area, before the establishment of the Funan State in the first century A.D. Settlements were close to lakes and rivers; the inhabitants engaged in agriculture and raised domestic animals such as cattle and pigs. Hunting was done with bow and arrow with arrowheads made of polished stone, bone and iron. Metal cultures reached the Cambodian region well before the first century A.D.

True historical knowledge begins with the rise of Funan. This earliest and most significant of the Indianized states is claimed by its inhabitants as being the first Khmer Kingdom. Funan was located on the delta of the Mekong River. During the early period, the population was concentrated in the area along the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. Traffic and communications were mostly waterborne. The country was a natural area fit for the development of fishing and rice-growing economy. Sea transportation played an important part in the development of Funan but the expansion of the country continued to have agriculture as its base. Evidence shows the existence of an extensive irrigation system in the heart of the region at the time. Indianization appears to have given Funan its character and influenced its development. The process was fostered by frequent contacts with visiting traders, travelers, and diplomats. The Sanskrit language was extensively used among the elite; an Indian legal code was put into effect and an Indian alphabet introduced.

Funan reached its summit during the reign of Kaudinya II as he maintained high internal security and good external relations with neighboring states. At the start of the sixth century, frequent civil wars and dynastic struggle seriously undermined the Kingdom's stability, making it easier prey to incursions by hostile neighbors. The latter part of the sixth century saw the country attacked and overtaken by Chenla, another Kingdom from the North.

Chenla did not consolidate its domination until the seventh century. The people of Chenla are known to have been Khmers. After their conquest of Funan, they engaged in a course of expansion for the next 300 years. For some time, they controlled central and upper Laos, portions of present day South Vietnam, Western Cambodia and Southern Thailand. The Chenla Kings preserved intact the Funanese governmental, religious and social institutions. However, in the eighth century, factional disputes among members of the royal family resulted in splitting the country into two rival northern and southern states: Land Chenla and Maritime Chenla. There followed a period of some turmoil and confusion. Later in the eighth century, as the Land Chenla remained relatively stable, the Maritime Chenla became a vassal of a Javanese dynasty. A last ruler of this latter Chenla with ties to Sambhupura, a minor Khmer state, ascended to the throne as Jayavarman II. He liberated the country from the Javanese suzerainty and finally unified the two segments of the nation.

KAMBUJA OR ANGKOR PERIOD:

The Angkor period, following the Chenla era, began early in the ninth century. As the Khmer empire continued its expansion, the state increasingly became an imperial theocracy. The deified monarch was the designated protector of the state religion, guardian of the sacred law, proprietor of all the land, and owner of all the Kingdom and its subjects. All the 4,000 officials were royal appointees from central to provincial administrations.

By a series of wars during the reign of Suryavarman II, the Khmer territory was further extended to encompass areas of present North Vietnam and those as far west as the Irrawaddy River in Burma. Suryavarman II was also the builder of Angkor Wat, considered to be the greatest single architectural work in Southeast Asia. Under him was developed an extensive network of roads and a large irrigation and reservoir system. Thirty years of dynastic dispute following his reign resulted in costly war against the Chams who destroyed Angkor in 1177. Jayavarman VII, in whose reign the empire reached its greatest territorial extent, repulsed the invaders. He built the great capital city complex of Angkor Thom, including its ten miles of walls and the temple of Bayon.

The people benefited from the effective management of the extensive irrigation system and accepted the monarchy as an authority preserving the law and order; however the building programs and the expansionist wars necessitated heavy taxes and forced labor. The people's discontent was expressed in a series of revolts. Upon the death of Jayavarman VII, the Khmer Empire entered a period of decline. In the thirteenth century independent Thai Kingdoms were established in the former Khmer territory. In 1353 a Thai army captured Angkor which was recaptured later. Angkor was looted a number of times and the Thai carried away thousands of Khmer artists and scholars. Continuous warfare between the Thai and the Khmer culminated with the Siamese capture and sack of Angkor Thom in 1431. This resulted in the abandonment of the City as the capital of the nation. The fall of Angkor marked the end of a definite cultural cycle which produced magnificent architecture with temples, monuments, sculptures, decorations, inscriptions, etcetera.

THE DECLINE

Many factors were involved in the fall of the Khmer Empire. Some western analysts even blame on the change to Theravada Buddhism as an important one. However, material factors were more obviously responsible. One of the most important ones was the fragility of the economic system. Under constant pressure from the Thais and the Chams, it was difficult to maintain the delicate irrigation system upon which Angkor's survival depended. The reservoirs and canals needed constant attention. Damage to the system during actual attacks by enemies and the sending off of thousands of prisoners of war weakened the economic base of the country further. Some analysts discount that malaria, spreading from the destroyed hydraulic system, played a part in the decline of Angkor. Confrontations between members of the royal family definitely weakened the Khmers. All the conditions were there and the stage set for the collapse of the Angkorian empire. After the abandonment of the City, the Khmer court moved south to Longvek, near the present-day Phnom Penh. The new capital was protected by stone fortifications, and within its limits were built a number of Buddhist temples. The then King Ang Chan invaded Siam in 1531 and repelled subsequent counterattacks. In one of his many invasions of Siam in 1564, he reached the Siamese capital city of Ayutthya, to find it occupied by the Burmese.

Ang Chan's successors continued to attack Siam; however, in the 1580's, emerged a powerful new Siamese King. The Cambodian capital of Longvek was captured by the Thais in 1594, and for the first time an alien political control was established over the Khmer state. About this time the Chinese migrants came to establish themselves in Phnom Penh and by early 1600's made up about one seventh of the total population. The Chinese lived in separate quarters which were run more or less independently from the Khmer authorities.

European countries, expanding their trade in Southeast Asia in the 16th century, showed little interest in Cambodia. The first European contacts were made mostly by Portuguese and Spanish missionaries and adventurers who arrived in Cambodia after the mid 1500's. Buddhist opposition caused the missionaries' departure. When the Siamese pressed toward Longvek during 1590's, the King requested help from the Spaniards who arrived too late.

In 1599, a major incident involving the Spaniards and the Malays erupted in Phnom Penh. Dutch traders, established in

Vietnam, struggled for control of Cambodia until the establishment of the French Protectorate.

THE FRENCH ERA

French control over Cambodia was an adjunct to French colonial involvement in Vietnam. King Ang Duong had sought in vain to obtain French assistance to regain former Cambodian lands held by Vietnamese. Only when they feared British and Thai control over the Mekong River, did the French push King Norodom into signing a protectorate treaty giving the French control over Cambodia's foreign affairs.

In the early years of the French protectorate, the European latecomers interfered little in the affairs of Cambodia. In the dispute with his half-brothers, Norodom gained rather than lost as the result of the French presence. Yet he had to resent the French recognition of Thai control over Battambang and Siemreap provinces. By 1870, French officials pressed for more control over internal affairs and sought to introduce reforms. Prince Sisowath, one of Norodom's half brothers, was ready to cooperate with the French who wanted to replace Norodom on the throne. Under French pressure, Norodom signed a colony treaty which resulted in a Cambodian uprising that lasted for two years. In 1891, the French representative in Phnom Penh assumed the leadership of the Cambodian Cabinet of Ministers and the King's role in government was reduced to a minimum. Norodom died a bitter man in 1904. Sisowath succeeded to the throne and reigned until 1927. There were no difficulties between the King and the French. With the preservation of the monarchy, the French administration successfully prevented the development of alternatives for national identification. One significant event occurring during Sisowath's reign was a protest by the rural masses against taxation and forced labor. The first important economic development by the French was the cultivation of rubber on the eastern plateaus.

Monivong, Sisowath's son, succeeded his father and reigned from 1927 to 1941. When he died in 1941, Japan was already established in Indochina. In the same year, the French governor placed Prince Norodom Sihanouk on the throne under difficult circumstances. The impact of the Japanese occupation on Cambodia was much smaller than in many other countries in Southeast Asia.

Following the end of World War II, Sihanouk favored cooperation with the French, and Cambodia became an autonomous state within the French Union.

CAMBODIA AFTER WORLD WAR II

After 1945, Cambodia was torn by factional disputes. Between 1946 and 1953, the dominant Democratic Party, led by Prince Yutivong and Eav Keus, was frequently at odds with King Norodom Sihanouk. In this atmosphere of internal discord and with France showing little interest in giving more power to Cambodia, Sihanouk decided to act. Early in 1953, he dissolved the Parliament and declared martial law. He conducted a vehement anti-French campaign around the world, and proclaimed independence from France on November 9, 1953.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 recognized Cambodia's neutrality, ordered the withdrawal of the Communist Viet Minh troops to Vietnam, and committed the country to elections in which everyone might vote. Sihanouk refused to associate himself with the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

In 1955, Sihanouk, fearing his power as a monarch would be reduced after an election, abdicated and put his own father, Suramarit, to the throne. He formed the *Sangkum* movement and assumed power as head of government. Urban intellectuals increasingly opposed him while his followers accorded him near God-King status.

Sihanouk accepted U.S. military aid in 1956. A U.S. Government study stated that they wanted him to maintain Cambodia's independence and reverse the drift towards pro-communist neutrality. Meanwhile, he accepted aid from Red China and repeated his denunciation of SEATO, further annoying the U.S. In 1959, Sihanouk claimed CIA involvement in a provincial right-wing plot to overthrow him.

Suspecting that his officers were becoming too dependent on American generosity, Sihanouk renounced U.S. economic and military aid and forced the closure of the U.S. aid missions during 1963. Sihanouk continued to play off Chinese, Soviet and American interests. In the countryside, he brutally suppressed tiny groups of the Khmer Rouge.

Sihanouk broke off diplomatic ties with the U.S. in 1965, and allowed North Vietnamese Communists to establish sanctuaries inside the borders of Cambodia. In the following year, Sihanouk allowed Communist supplies to be routed through the Cambodian port of Kompong Som to the eastern border areas with Vietnam. This traffic lasted until 1970.

Escalation of the war in Vietnam worried Sihanouk. He feared that his rundown Armed Forces would be unable to cope with any spillover of the hostilities into Cambodia.

In June 1969, Sihanouk announced restoration of relations with Washington. His playing off of left against right was becoming more precarious and his continued tolerance of the Vietnamese Communists along his borders was gaining increasingly hostile opposition from within his own government, the urban elite and the military. Prime Minister Lon Nol claimed that as many as 40,000 Vietnamese Communists were on Cambodian soil. B-52 bombings against suspected Communist bases along Cambodia's borders had pushed the Vietnamese Communists further into Cambodia.

Sihanouk left for a holiday and physical check-up in France in January 1970. In his absence, Lon Nol closed the port of Kompong Som, stirred up public anger against Vietnamese Communist infiltration of Cambodia and staged anti-Vietcong demonstrations. On March 11, 1970, a mass demonstration in Phnom Penh attacked the North Vietnamese Embassy and other Vietcong offices. Lon Nol apologized but gave the North Vietnamese seventy-two hours to quit Cambodia.

On March 18, 1970, Lon Nol, backed by Sirik Matak and supported by a vote of no-confidence against Sihanouk from the Parliament, staged a *coup d'etat* and gained an immediate recognition by the U.S. as head of the new government. In October 1970, Lon Nol abolished the monarchy and established the Khmer Republic.

Within five days, Sihanouk announced the formation of the National United Front of Kampuchea and sought the support of his old enemy, the Khmer Rouge.

By May, twelve thousand U.S. and six thousand South Vietnamese troops had attacked the Vietnamese Communists stationed in Cambodia.

From Peking, Sihanouk announced the formation of the Royal National Union Government of Kampuchea, which was immediately recognized by Peking and Hanoi. He declared himself Chief of State of Government in exile. A day later, Communist China, North Vietnam and North Korea broke off diplomatic ties with Cambodia.

Cambodia was involved in a full scale war by June of 1970. The Communists isolated Phnom Penh, won half of the country and took over twenty percent of the population. Fleeing the Communists and the bombing, hundreds of thousands of refugees swelled the population of Phnom Penh.

On February 13, 1971, Lon Nol flew out of the country to Hawaii as he suffered from a stroke. On his return a month later, it was felt that he was in no mental or physical condition to stay in office. On April 21, 1971, Lon Nol resigned. It proved impossible to form another government, so a few days later he was back and remained in power for another four years.

Lon Nol's troop controlled only an area around Phnom Penh containing a handful of towns, a large area around the province of Battambang and a strip of territory between the two by the summer of 1971. Supplies were flown in to Phnom Penh and thousands of refugees swelled its population daily. The North Vietnamese Army was well entrenched; it established supply routes from South Vietnam and helped train Khmer Rouge troops in Northeastern Cambodia.

On October 20, 1971, Lon Nol declared a state of emergency. Members of his Cabinet begged him to relinquish some of his powers. There were rumors of coups and fears that the Communists were about to arrive.

The Cambodian government estimated that two million of the country's seven million population had been displaced and that twenty percent of property had been destroyed by the end of 1971. A million and a half refugees inhabited Phnom Penh.

By the beginning of 1973, in Paris, North and South Vietnam signed an agreement on ending the war and restoring peace. The Khmer Rouge launched an assault on Kompong Cham.

Inflation ran at 250% per annum in 1974. Production continued to decline and exports were almost nil. Ninety-five percent of all income was from the U.S. aid, 80% of the country's pre-war paddy fields had been abandoned. The influx of the refugees into Phnom Penh had pushed the population up to two million, four times its original size; food was scarce and expensive, and there were frequent power cuts. The provincial cities and towns were also full of refugee camps and new arrivals told of Khmer Rouge brutality in the countryside.

In April, 1974, the last U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia, John Dean, arrived in Phnom Penh with instructions to bolster up Lon Nol's rapidly waning military position and explore the possibilities for talks with the enemy. In July, he managed to persuade Lon Nol to offer unconditional negotiations to the Communists. A strong promise was heard all over Phnom Penh and other cities that the U.S. would not, in any case, abandon the Khmer Republic. In Peking, this was denounced by Sihanouk who stated that he would never negotiate with the puppets.

The Khmer Rouge annual dry season offensive opened with rocket and artillery attacks at points surrounding Phnom Penh on January 1, 1975.

On April 1, 1975, Lon Nol left Cambodia forever. In the afternoon, the government's last defenses on the Mekong River fell and the Khmer Rouge, backed by Vietnamese Communists, took Neak Luong in bloody hand-to-hand fighting. This was followed by the evacuation by helicopters of U.S. Embassy staff and dependents which began eleven days later.

KHMER ROUGE ERA

The Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, April 17, 1975. They immediately started clearing the city of its inhabitants. The entire city was emptied of its people. Two and a half million people were on the move. They were told that the Americans were about to bomb the city so that they had to abandon their homes, taking just as much food as they could carry with them.

The Communist Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia, or Democratic Kampuchea, as it was officially titled, from April, 1975, to January, 1979, inspired by the agrarian Communism of Mao Tse-tung. The country became a vast work camp where communal life took over from family life. Names such as *mother* and *father* were changed into *comrade*. According to their ideology, an old society should be completely destroyed, and a new one can be created. Buddhism was the first to be abolished. All important priests were killed and the rest were forced to disrobe and marry. Teachers, doctors, actors, scientists, civil servants, military and students were killed for being enemies of the rural peasant revolution. Wives and husbands lived apart. Children were often used as spies for the Khmer Rouge government. The communization of all aspects of social life was governed by illiterate persons authorized by *Angka Loeu*, the Supreme organization of the Khmer Rouge. Indeed, these policies had already been tried out in the liberated zones of Cambodia long before the war against the Khmer Republic was completed. As the result of this policy, at least three million Cambodians were killed during the Khmer Rouge era.

In September, 1975, Sihanouk returned home from Peking and was elected Head of State. This was in name only and he was kept very much to his home. In February, 1976, Chou En Lai died and Sihanouk disappeared temporarily from public life. Khieu Samphan replaced him as Head of State.

In September, 1977, Pol Pot (formerly Salot Sar) emerged as Prime Minister. He openly aligned with China and described his government as Marxist-Leninist. Border and territorial disputes between Kampuchea and Vietnam had been worsening. The Kampuchean government feared that Vietnam intended to incorporate a socialist Kampuchea into a Vietnamese-dominated Indochina Federation. At the end of 1977, the Khmer

Rouge denounced Hanoi publicly.

In January, 1978, the Vietnamese Communist government launched a massive invasion into Cambodia. Many Khmer Rouge officials fled to Thailand. Towards the end of the year, the Vietnamese Communist troops launched a new invasion of northeast Cambodia. China backed Pol Pot. The Chinese, aware of the world's outrage at the Khmer Rouge brutalities, persuaded Pol Pot to embrace Sihanouk once again to create a more broad-based front.

When Phnom Penh fell into the Vietnamese Communists' hands on January 7th, 1979, the Khmer Rouge leaders retreated to the jungle. The Vietnamese Communists installed a regime trained and chosen by Hanoi. Cambodia became the People's Republic of Kampuchea. One group of the leaders was Hanoi-trained, and the other consisted of former Khmer Rouge functionaries who defected to Vietnam in 1977-1978 when Pol Pot turned his revolutionary terrorism against members of his own party.

Three separate resistance movements are fighting the Vietnamese occupation today. They form a tripartite Coalition Government. This government consists of the Khmer Rouge and two non-Communist groups. It has been recognized by the United Nations as the sole legitimate representative of that country in the world body. But the coalition exists largely for purposes of international diplomacy. Each of the three groups operates quite autonomously in its political and military activities inside Cambodia.

The powerful component of the resistance is the Khmer Rouge faction which is well supplied by China. But the Khmer Rouge has two problems in its struggle. The first one is that Chinese weapons, though plentiful, are technologically inadequate to destroy Vietnamese tanks and artilleries in a great number. The second problem the Khmer Rouge faces is its past political record. The Cambodian population fears a return to the terror, social dislocation and hard labor of the 1975-1978 period.

The second group within the resistance coalition is the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), a nationalist movement led by Son Sann who lived in France during the war of 1970-1975. He returned to the Thai border during the reign of the Khmer Rouge and from there entered Cambodia in 1979 to form the KPNLF in October of that year. The guerrilla leaders who are today Son Sann's field commanders are dedicated to the nationalist, anti-Communist cause. More than 140,000 Cambodians now live in KPNLF villages. The peasants, having fled both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists, provide the volunteers for Son Sann's guerrilla army.

The third and smallest component of the resistance coalition is the organization of Sihanouk, the former pro-Communist prince, created in Pyongyang, North Korea in 1979 and set up in Western Cambodia in 1981.

Chapter III

THE KHMER CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL WORTH

The value system of the Cambodian originates from many different cultural traditions: Khmer, Indian and French, with the influence of at least two distinct religions—Brahmanism and Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, it is not a homogeneous, unicultural system. Difference segments of the population do not equally share the entire complex of values; some tend to be more influenced by certain elements than others.

INFLUENCES

A combination of the ancient Khmer culture with Indian Hinduism represents the source of one set of values which are oriented toward a system of classes and rank distinctions. A person has a definite place in the society with a definite role. There exists a formal pattern of respect and deference between people of superior and inferior rank.

Another set of values derives from Theravada Buddhism. Here the main concepts are the unity of all life and the ultimate spiritual perfectibility and equality of all mankind. Doctrines include religious detachment from worldly affairs, the individual's responsibility for his own status in life, and the possibility of changing status through a combination of merit and reincarnation. Merit can be achieved through service to community, pagoda, and nation and by adhering to various rules of personal conduct. The rules emphasize the avoidance of causing suffering, self-discipline and improvement, humility, passivity, temperance, non-accumulation of wealth, and harmonious relations with others.

A third set of values derives from the cultural tradition of the French middle class, which has influenced Khmer society through government and education. This tradition allows individuals to raise his life status by the practical means of education and economic advancement. It stresses the active aspects of achievement and the accumulation of material wealth as means of attaining personal and social objectives. It is influential among upper classes and Khmer civil servants who have been exposed to western education. However, it has not penetrated to rural areas.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The rules of etiquette between people of different status are carefully spelled out for every situation. The limits of behavior for a defined situation must be adhered to although most Cambodians would readily shift to a more informal kind of interchange. When unable to understand the nature of a situation or placed between two conflicting situations, Cambodians tend to withdraw completely.

A principal role of a leader in Cambodian society is to explain. The follower is expected to respond by exerting himself to understand clearly the nature of any new situation and his possible role in it. Therefore, he questions all he can to find out about all possibilities and implications explained to him. Cambodians are good in discovering hidden meanings in speeches and texts. They rarely negotiate and enter discussions with goals they do not want to change.

Persistent disagreements come from the fact that each of the concerned parties believes that the other does not understand the situation. Resolution can come through explanation to all parties so as to obtain a common solution. When this turns out to be impossible, both sides react by withdrawing and the matter is left unresolved. Only time and circumstances can correct the situation. Intermediaries are sometimes called in to give advice and clarification.

INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENCE

Personal independence is given high value by Cambodians but it is not conceived in the same way Americans do. For a Cambodian, independence would mean freedom from obligation or commitment beyond his defined role of his status in a given situation.

Cambodians rarely confuse their formal roles in society with their informal personal roles. They do not inject personal overtones into formal situations.

However, there is high tolerance for variations in personal behavior, subject only to the admonitions of the religious code of personal conduct. Public and private roles are judged on different bases. While Americans would feel that a public official should lead an irreproachable private life, this is not the case for Cambodians. A Cambodian official may be censured for failing to observe the required behavior regarding a private life situation but not for disgracing a certain public office he holds.

PERSONAL CONDUCT

Cambodians believe that individuals should adhere to the Buddhist code of personal conduct. Proper standards of sexual behavior and/or premarital chastity and marital fidelity are given high value. Nonviolence is also an important value. The crime rate is quite low in the country. Temperance, diligence, thrift, and self-discipline are stressed. Children are taught not to lie as it is against Buddhist precepts. However, "social lying" may be considered as something else.

The more one can shape one's conduct along these ethical lines, the greater will be one's achievement of religious merit and the better one's next life will be. The individual's good conduct and services to the community will be approved by his neighbors and he will gain more respect from his fellows. In recognition he may be awarded a higher position within the religious, governmental or community organization.

Cambodians have felt little compulsion to succeed in a material sense. Acquisitiveness is not a dominant characteristic; adequacy is the objective in life.

Recently, however, some Cambodians have tended to reexamine their systems of values according to the modern way of thinking. While wealth would have more place in the new value system, it had never before been considered a way to accede to merit or economic or political power.

National interest remains to be an important part of the Cambodian scale of values.

Chapter IV

THE FAMILY

GENERAL CONCEPT

The family is the basic social unit of Cambodian society. Rural communities often develop out of clusters of households with close relationship. The rural family is also the basic unit of production and consumption and generally acts, and is treated, as a unit for labor exchange or contribution to the community. A typical Khmer family consists of a married couple and their unmarried children, often parents and grandparents also live in the family. It is rather normal to see three or four generations living together in one home.

Within the family, the wife deals with all household matters. The husband deals with the outside world. The elderly parents are supported by married or unmarried children until they pass away. Relationships between parents and children are precisely defined by traditions and law. Based on Buddhist precepts, tradition places great emphasis on respect for those of senior age or generation. Deriving from tradition, law affirms the mutual obligations of parents and children for maintenance and support. The legal aspect of these relationships is included in the Cambodian Civil Code covering marriage, divorce, rights of wives, plurality of wives, adoption, guardianship, parental authority, inheritance, etcetera

Strengthened by religious precept, long tradition and national law, the Cambodian family is a relatively conservative and stable institution. Ties between parents and children are the strongest and most durable of all social connections.

Due to financial reasons, it is not always possible for a newly married couple to establish immediately their own separate residence. In such cases, the couple lives temporarily with parents of either husband or wife. Normally, a married child remains in the household to care for older parents, and the house will belong to the young couple when the parents pass away.

Having no children is a misfortune to the Cambodians, and a large family is considered a good thing. The birth of a baby, boy or girl, is always a happy event. Children may be legally adopted or informally adopted for some periods of time. In practice, informally adopted children usually have the same rights and duties as natural children. However, in cases of controversy over inheritance their legal position is weaker. Children trace descent equally through the father's and mother's lines. Usually, there is no difference in the relationship with relatives on either side of the family. Ties between generations or between related households are loose and informal. A couple is expected to give material or financial aid to needy parents and to brothers or sisters of either spouse. More remote relatives are also aided but to a lesser extent. Sons and daughters may inherit equally from their parents. However, parents may decide to give a larger share to the offspring who has taken special care of them. The parents' will on dividing of property can be a written or an oral one. A wife may continue to own her inherited property and may use it as she sees fit.

Upon marriage, a woman takes her husband's first and last names. She may still be called by her own first name (example: husband's name: *Keo* Sam Kol, wife's maiden name: *Meas* Rumduol → wife's married name: Mrs. *Keo* Sam Kol. Official documents would list her as "Mrs. Keo Sam Kol born Meas Rumduol". Informally, she would mostly be called *Mrs. Sam Kol* but also may be called *Mrs. Rumduol*). Please note also that names are written in this order: last name, first part of first name then second part of first name. The middle part of the whole name cannot be treated as middle name as in the western style.

ROLES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

The husband is responsible for housing and feeding all members of the family. In rural families, he does the principal work of preparing the soil, seeding, cultivating and harvesting the crops. In urban areas, a different pattern prevails but the major responsibility of family support is still borne by the husband.

The wife plays a key role within the family in many respects since the prosperity, well-being, and reputation of the household depend a lot on her. She is responsible for the training of children, especially the female ones whose good conduct will bring prestige to the family. She is most often the budget keeper of the household.

Relatives by marriage are generally regarded as close as blood relatives. There is much visiting back and forth among kinsfolk. In case of need, money is borrowed, generally without interest, from a relative rather than a non-relative.

Relationships within the greater family are regarded as the ideal model for all friendly social relations.

CHILDBIRTH AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

In rural areas, an expectant mother prefers to have a midwife deliver the baby at home. She stays home for at least seven days after delivery. Babies are treated with affection by everyone and spend most hours sitting on one's lap or straddling one's hip. Children in the country side are breast-fed up to two years of age or even more. Until age three or four, the child receives much attention while only few demands are made on him. Afterward, the child receives less attention and has to feed and bathe himself. At five, he begins associating more with other children. A girl of this age may be given more responsibility in caring for younger siblings, light house-work or even some cooking. At six or seven, children of both sexes go to school. Parents place high value on their children's receiving some education. Very low rates of absenteeism may be attributed to this. Most children's games stress skill rather than intelligence and very few games involve competing teams.

After the infant stage, the child is expected to conform to norms of politeness and obedience. The father takes up his authoritarian role *vis-a-vis* the children. A girl of ten can perform most household duties such as cooking a meal, sewing, washing clothes, and caring for younger ones. A boy of this age learns how to tend draft animals and knows the basic techniques of agriculture. Brothers and sisters never touch or kiss each other. Children are not free to do what they want. Girls are under stricter supervision, and sex segregation is the common social rule. A girl, after reaching the age of puberty, must observe a period of one month's seclusion called "the shadow month" sometime before her marriage. During this period she is to stay inside the home at all time and eats a vegetarian diet. The relationships among siblings are based on age. Children are taught to use the respectful forms of language by referring to their older brothers and sisters as "big brother" and "big sister". The reputation of a family depends to a great extent upon the behavior of children in and outside their family.

Around the age of ten, a boy may take up his monkhood and stay in the pagoda for some time to "wash out" his sins and to show obedience to his parents. During his service time as novice monk, he learns the holy scripture written in Pali and the good code of conduct according to Buddhist teaching.

Khmer children most often play with those of their own age and sex but mixed groups sometimes play together. However, sex segregation in adolescence is the rule. In rural areas, adolescent girls do not go anywhere unless escorted by an adult or a child. Virginity of brides is highly valued and premarital sex deeply deplored. Sex before marriage is a great shame for the girl and her family. By whatever means necessary parents prevent children to gain knowledge about sex for they feel that such knowledge would lead to desire and trouble.

Most men marry between the age of nineteen and twenty-four; and most girls marry between sixteen and twenty-two. Although young people in the same community see each other occasionally and have chances to become acquainted, there exits no such thing as "dating". Youngsters, most often, have little choice in the selection of their marriage partner. It remains a general rule, especially in the rural areas, that parents select a spouse for their son and daughter as they believe that this is within their domain of responsibility. On the contrary, parents and children in urban families tend to accept more and more present practices of western societies.

Chapter V

THE LANGUAGE SYSTEM

Khmer, also known as *Cambodian*, is the official language of Cambodia. It is the mother tongue of the Khmer race which comprises approximately 85 percent of the country's population. Khmer is the major language of the Mon-Khmer family, which includes the Mon language spoken in lower Burma, and hundreds of hill tribe languages and dialects spoken by people scattered over mainland Southeast Asia.

Owing to extensive historical ties to Indian culture, the Khmer language has many loan words and derivatives from Sanskrit. With the coming of Theravada Buddhism in the thirteenth century, Pali, the sacred Theravadin language, was borrowed in the same manner. The Pali and Sanskrit heritage is shared with the Thai and Lao. Since the French colonial time, French has become part of the colloquial language of urban people. To a much lesser extent, Khmer has words borrowed from Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese.

There are dialects of Khmer differing from one another mostly in pronunciation which may vary as widely as dialects of American English. A particular Khmer pronunciation depends on the part of Cambodia from which it comes.

There exists, however, the principal standard Khmer which is taught in schools and used in official circles and in national radio broadcasts.

THE KHMER LANGUAGE AND ITS WRITING

In contrast with Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai, the Khmer language is non-tonal. This means that variations in pitch are not part of the basic sound structure of words. Khmer has a monotone but staccato quality, with a rising inflection at the end of each sentence.

Words are mostly short, usually one syllable, sometimes two. Longer words are mostly loan-words from Sanskrit and Pali.

The Khmer alphabet originated in Southern India around the sixth century and was introduced into Cambodia along with other Indian cultural elements. There are 33 consonant symbols, 21 dependent vowel symbols and 12 independent vowel symbols.

Efforts were made to romanize the Khmer writing system by the French administration. No uniform system was agreed upon and resistance came mostly from religious circles. The clergy felt that romanization would eliminate the traditional sacred teaching.

As there exist Khmer sounds with no equivalent in English and vice versa, an exact transliteration would be difficult if not impossible. This is also true for Khmer sounds against the French ones. Any romanization of written Khmer by Westerners could only be an approximation.

Two printing styles of Cambodian characters prevail: *chrieng* characters, meaning cuneiform or wedge-shaped, is the ordinary style used in regular textbooks, official documents, journals and normal writing; and *mul* characters, meaning cursive, which has roundish strokes was used in transcription of Pali text. Extended use of *mul* characters is made to represent capital letters in a title or in italicized words in a *chrieng* text. The Khmer script has a decorative and artistic appeal. One can enjoy just looking at the orderly and well-drawn Khmer scripts.

USAGE—WORD FORMATION—SENTENCES

As in English, sympathy and sorrow are expressed by low grumbling sounds, and anger can be detected by increased tempo as well as raised voice. Witticisms and humorous formations are considered treasures in conversation. Generally considered to have a gentle temperament, the Khmer tends to have a sharp tongue. Any talent for improvisation or impromptu versification is greatly admired.

Cambodian lends itself to oratorical flourishes. Allegorical references occur profusely in conversation. However it is advised that non-natives avoid these allegorical complications since they may imply something obscure. Khmer can be called an ambiguous language as it contains numerous hidden meanings. Among themselves, the Cambodians respond to any linguistic cues in order to clarify the meaning.

It can be said Khmer has four sets of vocabulary: one used by people of equal footing, one used while speaking to the respected people such as elderly folks or superiors, one used when addressing monks and, one used when addressing members of the royal family. This reflects the richness of the language as well as the definite stratification of the Khmer society.

Khmer is unusual in that it has affixes which alter the meaning of the word or change it from one part of speech to another. Besides prefixes and suffixes, it also has infixes, which are affixes inserted into the middle of words. Here are some examples of Khmer affixes:

prefix: [pdɔl] = 'facilitate', from [dɔl] = 'reach'
infix: [sɔm bɔt] = 'oath', from [sbɔt] = 'swear'
suffix: [ponmaan] = 'how much', from [pon] = 'equal'

Khmer has also additives or companion words which couple to plain words for better resonance, for emphatic purposes or to indicate the higher number of something. Example: [mnus] becomes [mnusmneə] ='people'. The symbol "ៗ" after a word shows that the word needs be repeated to give emphasis. This symbol is mostly used after adjectives.

The basic word order in Khmer sentences is *subject—verb—object* as it is for English. The preposition *to* as in "I go *to* school" does not exist; nor does the verb *be* as in "My house *is* big".

Khmer is one of those languages which does not express grammatical relationships by suffixes (e.g. English plural *-s*, past tense *-ed*, or progressive *-ing*). Function words are used to express these same things.

Chapter VI

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Traditionally, education in Cambodia was intended for learning the Cambodian language and writing and Buddhist doctrine. Before World War II, the educational goal of the French administration was to train a group of civil employees. After 1954, the Cambodian government's aim was to train enough staff for the administration as well as for the industrial and business sectors. One official objective was the complete alphabetization of Cambodian.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Before 1975, education in Cambodia was highly centralized and financed by the national budget. The Ministry of Education assumed full control and supervision over all aspects of the educational system: establishing education policy, rules and regulations, building schools, hiring and paying teachers, inspecting schools, producing educational materials, setting up a uniform curriculum for the whole country, providing for school expenditures, organizing examinations, etcetera.

As stated in the Constitution, elementary education was compulsory. All public primary schools were open to the public without charge. Education at the primary level was also conducted in pagoda schools. Elementary classes were operating in practically every village inside Cambodia. Statistics for 1970 showed more than 5,000 public primary schools with student enrollment close to one million for a total population of around seven million. This is considered high participation for a developing country.

Elementary education consisted of six years of schooling. At the end of the first three years, the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires* was awarded. At the end of the last three years, the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires Complèmentaires* was awarded. A large percentage of students dropped out after completing grade six and went back to field work as helping hands in rice-growing areas. Elementary curriculum put emphasis on academic study and included Cambodian ethics, civics, history, geography, arithmetic, science, hygiene, manual training and physical education. After national independence, French faded out as medium of instruction and became a foreign language taught in the seventh grade onward.

Secondary education consisted of seven years of schooling, divided into a four-year cycle followed by a three-year cycle. Before the war broke out in 1970, there were about 150 government secondary schools with an enrollment of about 120,000 students. The drop-out rate between primary school and secondary school was high, since students were required to pass an entrance examination before they could enroll in public secondary school. A school offering the entire seven-year program of instruction is called a *lycée* while a school offering the first four years of the program is called a *collège*. Students who completed education in a *collège* could transfer to a *lycée*. At the end of the four-year cycle, students were required to take an examination. A first secondary diploma called *Diplôme d'Etudes du Premier Cycle* was given to successful candidates.

The second cycle of secondary education was also divided into two parts, the first part consisting of two years and the second of one year. Each part ended with a required state examination sanctioned by the *Baccalauréat I* and the *Baccalauréat II*.

The system of examination was very selective; the proportion of passing candidates was between ten and twenty percent for any one year. Students who failed at exams had to repeat the same class again or were put out of school if they had repeated once already. The French style examination lasted from several days to a week. Students who failed at the first session and who did not make very bad grades were allowed to go through a make-up session at the end of summer vacation. Vocational schools were designed to train high school children to become technicians. Several of these vocational schools located in Phnom Penh and a few were established in the provinces. Students took up such specialized fields as electricity, automobile mechanics, machine shop, carpentry, masonry, agriculture, animal husbandly, chemistry lab, nursing, elementary school teaching, etcetera. Higher technical training was also provided by universities.

Higher education was available in universities mostly clustered inside the capital city of Phnom Penh. Several other universities were located in big provincial towns. There was a high enrollment in scientific and technical studies, lower enrollment for letters and social sciences, and the lowest attendance for education and fine arts. Cambodian students could choose the following majors: letters, humanities, pure sciences, law, economics, medicine, pharmacy, business, teaching, agronomy, forestry, and veterinary medicine. Other institutions of higher learning offered major courses in civil engineering, electrical engineering, architecture, fine arts, Buddhist studies, public administration, etcetera.

Private schools were mostly operated by minority groups—French, Chinese, Vietnamese—in order to make it possible for their children to study in their own native language. Control over these schools by the Ministry of Education was rather loose.

METHODS OF EDUCATION

From national independence until 1975, school enrollment had been booming at all levels of education. During the first year after independence the stress was on expanding primary education. It was later shifted to secondary schooling and, during the 1960's, toward higher education and technical education at secondary and university level. Cambodia has had an acute shortage of teachers, schools, and equipment. The national budget fell short of being able to cope with the rapid increase of student population. The shortage resulted in low standards. "Diploma teachers" amounted only to less than ten percent of the total. Moreover, teaching was not an attractive career. The pay was not good and the prestige of teachers was lower than that of other sectors of the government.

Traditional schools in Buddhist temples were primarily regarded as places for teaching Buddhist precepts. Later model schools were seen by the government as a place for guiding young people in the awareness of their civic duties.

Cambodian teaching methods rely on memorization rather than the development of intelligence and initiative. Typical classrooms in rural areas were small halls surrounded by wooden walls. Those in urban areas were more elaborate buildings having several stories built of bricks, concrete and tiles. Laboratories, libraries, textbooks, and audio-visual equipment were almost non-existent.

Classes were very crowded, holding from fifty to sixty students. All schools were co-educational with the exception of one high school for girls in Phnom Penh. However, boys and girls did not sit at a same table. Girls usually sat in the first rows. Relations between boys and girls were characterized by reserve and shyness.

Students were expected to show respect and obedience to their teachers. They never volunteered to answer questions but waited to be called upon by the teachers. Discipline was very strict. Students could be expelled temporarily or indefinitely for bad behavior.

Like every other institution, the entire school system was destroyed after the Khmer Communists took control of Cambodia in April 1975. There were no more classrooms, students, teachers or Education Department. Everything was considered "western contamination". Students in higher grades were condemned to die along with their teachers and other civil servants. Textbooks of all types were burned or dumped into the river. There was no schooling for over four years under the Khmer Rouge. After the invasion by the Vietnamese Communist forces and the establishment of the new regime in Phnom Penh in 1979, there were reports of schools reopening. It was, however, a minimum of school activities with many components lacking.

It is appropriate to point out that Cambodian refugee children who arrived after 1981 had been out of school for several years.

Chapter VII

RELIGION

The official religion of Cambodia was Theravada Buddhism, one of the two major forms of Buddhism. Over 80 percent of the total population adopted this religion. Theravada Buddhism was the state religion as mandated by the Constitution. It was an important source of national integration and the primary provider of the value system for the overwhelming majority of the population. Since the 13th century, Buddhism had been the predominant popular belief in Cambodia. Before that time, the religion practiced by the royal circle was the Brahmanic cult which included the worship of the god-king or *devar*. This cult, which flourished inside the court, did not have much effect on the mass who practiced animistic and ancestral cults. Such spirit cults have survived among Cambodians and do not compete nor conflict with Buddhism or Brahmanism.

Buddhism emphasizes the ultimate goal of *nirvana*, a state in which all desire and individual consciousness including suffering are abolished. In contrast to the monk, an ordinary man is thought to be quite remote from this goal. He can take satisfaction in having risen so far within the great hierarchy of living things and can hope for a better rebirth or reincarnation with more good doings in his present life. However, to deal with the spiritual difficulties of daily life, the Khmer Buddhist relies upon local and ancestral spirits. He will beg for relaxation of punitive actions on their parts in time of distress, or he will seek their approval for any new venture.

The provision in the national Constitution for freedom of religion was well implemented, and every ethnic group was allowed to worship as it desired. The Cham remained attached to Islam, the Chinese and Vietnamese adhered to Mahayana Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism or other sects such as Confucianism and Taoism.

THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF BUDDHISM

At the time when Hinduism, also called Brahmanism, was widespread in India, Prince Siddharta (563-483 B.C.) initiated Buddhism in that country. He rejected his royal status, his rights and his wealthy living to become a wandering ascetic. After years of meditation, according to Buddhist scriptures, he attained enlightenment while praying under a Bo tree. Spreading all over India, Buddhism reached Sri Lanka in 246 B.C. after which time the *Tripitaka*, the sacred scripture of Theravada Buddhism, was committed to writing. It was originally written in Pali, an ancient Indian language derived from Sanskrit. The Cambodian translation of the basic religious text was the first one to be accomplished in its entirety in any other language.

Buddhism began as a reform of old Hindu doctrines. Both the Buddhist and the Hindu sees the universe and all living forms as parts of eternal, cyclical and recurrent process. For the Buddhist, the present life is merely a state or phase of an endless progression of events which does not cease with death. Life and death are merely alternate aspects of the existence of individuals. It is possible that an individual will have his next existence as a better or a worse being, or a god, or even a lower animal. The continuous cycle of rebirth involving all living things is called *sansara*. Theravada Buddhism does not require a belief in a god but insists upon the responsibility of each individual for his behavior.

Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism is based on three components: Buddha, the "eternal" guide; *dharma* or the teaching of Buddha, the way to right action and belief which center on *Karma*, the belief that the present life and thereafter depends on one's deeds and misdeed; and the *Sangha*, the clergy who carry on Buddhist teaching.

Not much of the Buddhist concepts was original to Buddha. The Brahmanic vision of *sansara* is the endless series of pain and sorrow in every life. The Buddhist addition to the concept, which can be considered as an elaboration, is the hope for heaven or a happy life after death. *Nirvana*, the most perfect stage a living form can attain, represents a complete release from *sansara*. One can gain this state of enlightenment, in which all illusions of existence are conquered, after achieving the best of *Karma* by earning most merits and avoiding all misdeeds.

The Buddhist concepts can be summarized as follows: suffering exists; it has a cause which is nothing besides the craving for existence; such craving can be stopped by following the Path. The Path, in simple terms, consists of right understanding, right purpose, right speech, right conduct, right vocation, right effort, right thinking and right meditation.

The *Karma* doctrine holds that one's actions in this life and in all previous ones determine what stage in the hierarchy of living creatures one will occupy in the next incarnation. One's *Karma* can be favorably affected by one's acts. The five precepts which all good Buddhists try to comply with at all times are: do not kill; do not steal, do not commit adultery; do not tell lies; and do not take intoxicants or liquors. On saint days, four times a month, they may choose to take up three additional omissions: do not participate in any sense-exciting activity such as dancing or singing; do not use any personal adornment; do not eat after midday. Buddhist monks must strictly follow the ten basic precepts comprising the eight listed above and two more: do not rest on a luxurious bed (mattress is considered a luxury); do not handle money or other valuables. The ten basic precepts must be observed every day of the monkhood. There are up to two hundred twenty-seven rules of monastic discipline to be obeyed by a *phikhu*, a fully ordained monk, and only seventy-five for a novice monk.

THE *SANGHA* AND THE *WAT* (TEMPLE)

The Buddhist hierarchy in Cambodia is organized in accordance with the state regulations. There are two separate monastic orders: the *Mohanikay* order (the great congregation) and the *Thommayut* order (the doctrinal group). The *Mohanikay* is by far the oldest and the largest of the two orders with over ninety percent of the members of the *sangha* belonging to it.

Before the war broke out in 1970, there existed around 2,800 *wat* or monasteries with about 90,000 monks living in them at one time.

There appear to be no real doctrinal differences between *Thommayut* and *Mohanikay* orders. However, they disagree on certain details of behavior; for example, the *Thommayut* monks adhere more strictly to the rules.

Until recently, according to Buddhist tradition, each Cambodian male spent some time of his life as a member of the *sangha* to show obedience to his parents and to learn the good ways of life. The time thus spent may be as short as three months. The most popular time for Cambodians to enter the monkhood is the *Vossa*, the Buddhist retreat period which ends in October.

Members of the *sangha* had been outside the scope of civil legal actions and exempt from all public duties. They were not eligible to vote or hold official office. They were not affected by military draft and could not be tried without first being defrocked. The expulsion of a monk can be decided by the head of the local *wat*, with approval of the superior of the order.

The hierarchy of the *sangha* can be summarized in the following list:

- *Rachiakanak*, head of each of the two orders (*Mohanikay* and *Thommayut*)

- *Thananukrum*, one rank below the first, after 20 years of service.
- *Chau athika*, head of a temple or *wat*.
- *Kru saut*, two in each *wat*, assisting *Chau athika*.

Each *wat* has one or two lay assistants, called *achar*, who act as intermediary between the monks and laymen. The *achar* rarely lives in the *wat*. He represents the monks in contacts with the government, acts as master of ceremony at celebrations and leads the prayers. The *Chau athika* supervises the occupants of the temple, monks and students as well, and is responsible for the buildings and temple grounds and a smooth operation of the temple school.

A *wat* may be inhabited by as few as ten or twenty monks or as many as several hundreds. Typically, a *wat* consists of a cluster of buildings made mostly of wood and tiles or bamboo and thatch, which are usually built on stilts. These buildings serve as shelters for monks and a number of religious elderly folks. A walled enclosure surrounds the complex. The main entrance is from the east and is generally guarded by strange figures of animals or legendary characters. In the middle of the compound stands the most important structure called the *Vihear*, the temple proper, which is always a piece of architecture and art work. The *vihear*, a huge building in itself, contains a large statue of Buddha in meditating posture. One or two open halls or *sala* serve as place for public ceremonies for a neighboring population amounting to several hundreds. Most temples have a number of beautiful shrines containing the cremated remains of dead persons. There is generally an elementary school inside a *wat*.

Life in the *wat* is dominated by restrictions and prohibitions. A monk must follow the Buddhist precepts more strictly than do the layman. For example, a Buddhist monk can not get closer than several feet to a female. The rules of honesty and sobriety are more exacting for the *sangha* than for the laymen.

A *sangha* must have his head, eyebrows and beard shaved every two weeks. Each of his days is generally full and well ordered. He should be up around five o'clock every morning. After washing up, he practices his prayers in Pali and Cambodian. Around seven or eight he starts off, with or without a temple boy, to beg the daily food. This trip around the neighboring communities could last several hours. Other principal duties include studying the holy scriptures, and teaching other monks and children. Some monks may have to go out to officiate at village ceremonies: wedding, cremation, burial, moving to a new home, a child's birthday, attendance to the sick and even family counseling. Shortly before noon he takes his last meal of the day; then comes a time for rest and contemplation. In the afternoon he can help take care of the ground inside the *wat*. On the whole, a monk spends a good part of his time learning and reciting the scriptures. Classroom learning would include mathematics, history, geography and sciences with much concentration on literature.

In recent years, adolescents and young men would rather pursue a secular education than take up the monkhood. Yet, in spite of some influence from the industrialized world, the *sangha* still occupies a unique position in the transmission of Khmer culture and values within the traditional and conservative society.

Chapter VIII

ART FORMS AND EXPRESSION

Cambodian art is undoubtedly one of the most prestigious in the whole of Southeast Asia. It is also one of the most systematically studied.

Derived from Indian culture for the most part, Khmer art progressed through phases that parallel the ones of Cambodian history. Peaks of artistic and intellectual achievement were reached during the early Funan period and during the later Angkor period. This latter one is represented by the great stone monuments of the Angkor region dating from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries.

The temples of Angkor are by no means the only remains of the great period. Angkor was the capitol of a vast empire which included most of present Laos and Thailand and part of Malaysia. Stone monuments, steles, temples and statuaries are witness to the spread of Cambodian civilization all over these areas. It is unfortunate that most of the literature of the old time was written on materials easily destroyed by tropical dampness and insects. However the quality of the lost part may still be judged from the inscriptions carved on old stones. Elements of ancient Khmer literature can be found in both poetry and prose. They include royal decisions, legal codes, records of battles, hymns dedicated to gods, etcetera.

Both the literary inscriptions and the architectural remains prove Cambodia's cultural debt to India. Nevertheless there are also signs of true native inspirations and Indian models were never slavishly copied. Nowhere in India can be find something comparable to the general simplicity and unity of Angkor Wat or Bayon art styles.

During the Thais' long conquest over Cambodia, they absorbed much of the Khmer culture. Tens of thousands of the best Cambodian scholars and artists were forced away by Thai raiders as slaves. At one time, they carried off the whole of population of Angkor, then capital of Cambodia. Khmer culture never recovered from the setback. Some contemporary Cambodian artists are inclined to look to Thai for guidance.

The artistic and intellectual life of present Cambodia is overshadowed by the greatness of the past. That glory seems to be lost and irretrievable. The grandiose spirit that built the wonderful stone temples of Angkor no longer exists. Ingenuity is no longer perpetuated in stones but limited to items designed for tourists. These items of different forms endlessly repeat the ancient themes. To the educated layman, the state of the art appeared to be of little concern. Public matters, internal and international political problems drew much of their attention. However, there was some evidence of intellectual revival. Many youngsters showed a new sense of dedication, especially after World War II.

ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE

All ancient buildings are of religious inspiration. Among those known to us, none was erected before the start of the 7th century. Since that time, every religious center has been the tower temple covered with a number of terraces. The tower temples became more and more complex. Their composing elements were laid out after a geometrical plan. Many buildings might be on the same platform in a single or double row or in quincunxes; but most frequently they were built on the top of pyramids with terraces called "mountain-temples". This type of complex is linked to royal worship and represent a symbolism hard to understand. Phnom Bakheng is an example. They became even more sophisticated by the addition of halls and arcades extensively and advantageously utilized. The culmination of Khmer ancient architecture was attained at the construction of the great Angkor complex, terminated in the first part of the 12th century. Originally, the temples were built from bricks bonded together with high strength. From the end of the 10th century, sandstone, rarely replaced by laterite, started to replace bricks. Throughout the 11th century, sandstone became the only building material.

One of the most original features of Khmer art continues to be the face-towers as inspired by Buddhist cosmology. Bayon style is a typical example. After Bayon, not a mountain-temple was built on ground level. Even before Angkor was abandoned, traditional architecture was no longer followed. The work of Jayavarman VII, during whose reign the style of Bayon was created which was intended to express royal symbolism, could not be completed by his successors. With the rising of Theravada Buddhism another concept was introduced. Buddhist doctrine was emphasized but not the durability of the constructions. With the same building techniques, bricks and mortar replaced stone in buildings erected in the following centuries. Later on, composite construction ideally suited for monastic architecture came into use not just inside Cambodia but also in Thailand and Laos.

Architectural decorations played a major role in Khmer art. Its evolution through time has enabled scientists to date Khmer historic buildings with much accuracy. Sandstone or other materials were smartly carved into lintels, small decorated columns, pilasters and pediments exposing a wide range of foliated scrolls mixed with human figures and animals of various postures. From an early time to 13th century, access to the complexes was emphasized by paths, steps and terraces. Decoration of these structures was by lined carved stone blocks representing statues of guards or lions and by ornated corner posts. Sometimes multi-headed *nagas* or *garudas* terminated the beautiful balustrades.

The images of deities and guardians of temples in narrative low relief also show the development of Khmer sculptures. Most statues are made of sandstone; bronze images are rare, and wood-carving became popular only after the 13th century. Mostly made of stoneware, Cambodian ceramics generally have classical baluster shapes which coexist with those of animal shape or other more functional shapes.

Information about architecture and sculpture after the 13th century is generally lacking mostly because the use of stone was abandoned. The Thai occupation of Angkor and the forced removal of artists resulted in the impoverishment of Khmer arts. Post-Angkor architectural works have been represented by the royal palace in Phnom Penh and Buddhist temple structures spread over the whole country. Modern sculpture with chief subjects being Buddha, *naga* heads, *apsaras* and other motifs derived from ancient Cambodia are made in local marble.

MUSIC

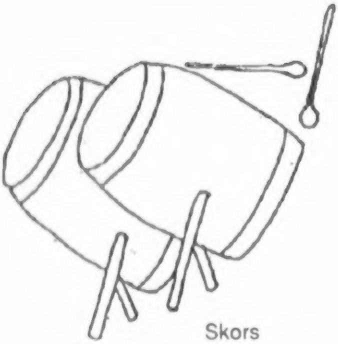
One of the most common forms of art expression is singing improvised lyrics to traditional music. It is done at any pleasant time by any one: the little boy tending the water buffalo, children playing together, young men and women courting at field-work, old men conducting ox-cart, etcetera. The words may endlessly be improvised but the number of tunes is quite limited. Cambodians have no musical notation system of their own, and the western system was not really introduced until after World War II. Even today, traditional musicians do not use the modern notation. Most of the tunes and songs are carried orally from one generation to the next. Some of the songs have been transferred back and forth to and from Thailand or Laos.

Playing some sort of musical instruments is a common form of popular amusement. Making and playing instruments may be both considered traditional arts. The fact that Cambodians learn to play instruments with rapidity, even though without formal instruction, surprises many Westerners. Most instruments are decorated with elaborate inlay work. Music is likely to be present at every social and festive gathering. At one such gathering, a person present can improvise songs while others will accompany him on instruments if any are available. At least, rhythmic hand clapping by the group will give similar effect. Although western musical instruments have been introduced, native Khmer instruments are still highly popular. It is not uncommon to see both types of instruments in the same musical band. Among western imports, the banjo, mandolin, guitar and violin are quite popular. A typical Khmer orchestra, for example the one used to accompany the Royal Ballet, would consist of three xylophones, two *kongthom* (large circles of suspended copper gongs), several one-or two-stringed violins, several wind instruments made of bamboo or wood, and a series of long drums played with big sticks or fingers.

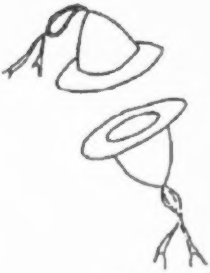
There seems to be music to accompany all celebrations and festivals. And there is a type of musical band for each occasion. The *Bassac* theater is accompanied by several saxophones, a trumpet, a trombone, a western drum set, a guitar and one or two Khmer instruments. A similar band is used in funeral processions in urban areas. Traditional orchestras are common at even the village level. These amateur bands are mostly composed of typical Cambodian instruments: several two-stringed violins, a flute, a small drum, a western banjo or mandolin and a guitar. Families or neighbors may perform impromptu private concerts after dinner. This type of concert always entertains the whole village population at wedding ceremonies in the country side, whereas western style bands entertain the ones in urban areas.

Cambodian music is often not appreciated by Westerners, and western music usually is unpleasant to Cambodians except for Latin American beats which are close to the Khmer folk rhythms. The Cambodian musical scale has five tones compared to seven in the western scale. Orchestral music has no harmony in the technical musical sense. The melodies are usually simple. The musicians do not use a score but follow the lead of one instrument played by the group leader. Each player can improvise as much as he chooses. The rhythm usually is a mere two-beat which is not so fast and not so slow.

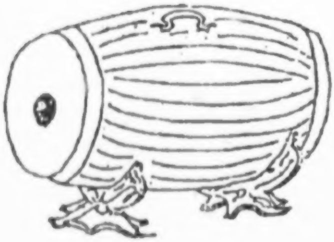
PIN PEAD ORCHESTRA



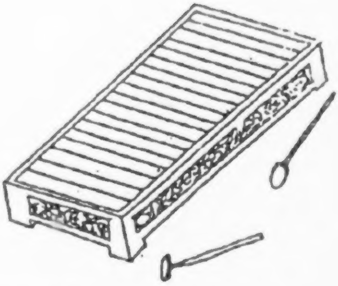
Skors



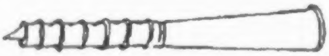
Chop Choeng



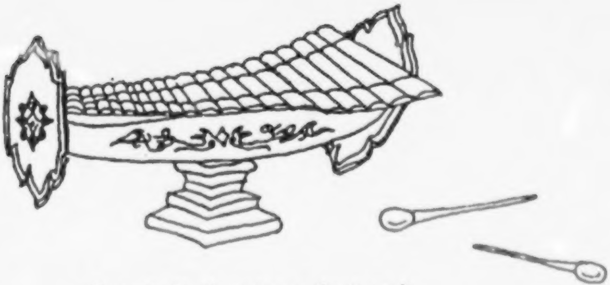
Sampo



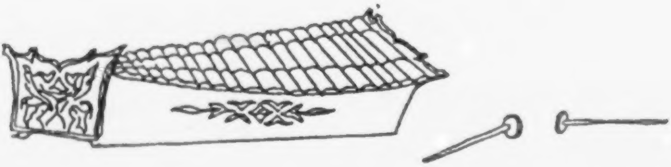
Raneat Dek (steel xylophone)



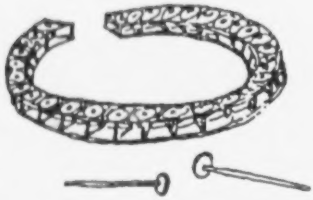
Sralai (flute)



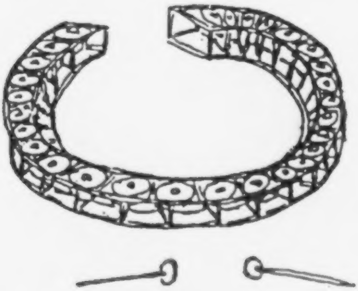
Raneat Ek (wooden xylophone)



Raneat Thung (bamboo xylophone)



Kong Tauch (small gongs)



Kong Thom (big gongs)

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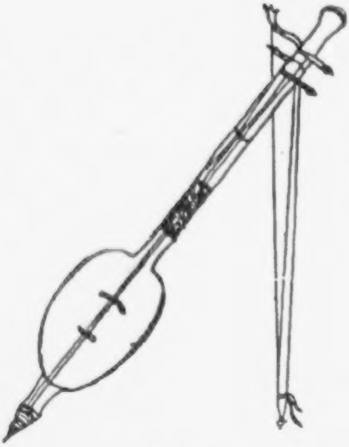
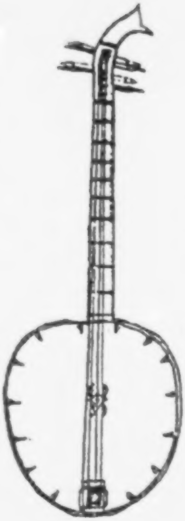
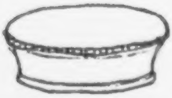
MARRIAGE ORCHESTRA



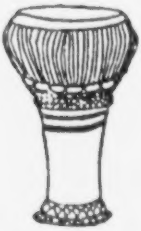
Tro Khmer (a three-stringed violin)



Chapei (guitar)



Skor Sampet



Skor Kar

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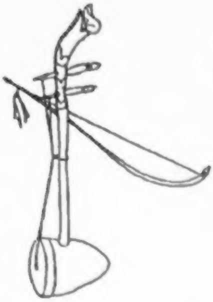
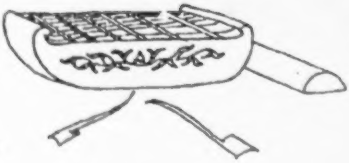
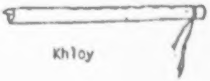


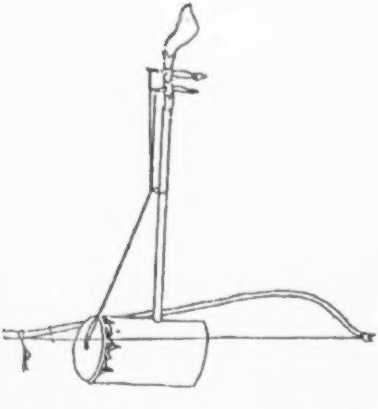
Tro Ou



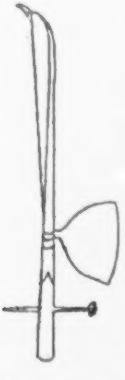
Khim



Khloy

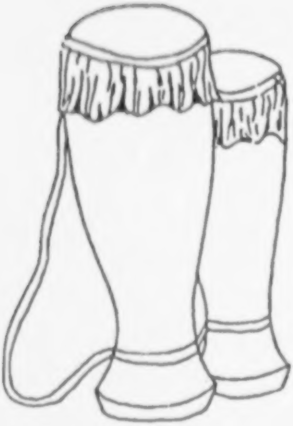


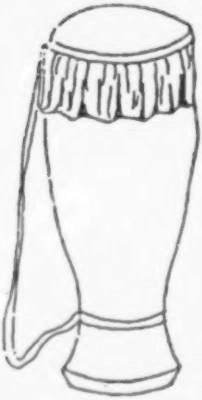
Tro So

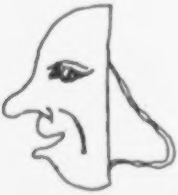


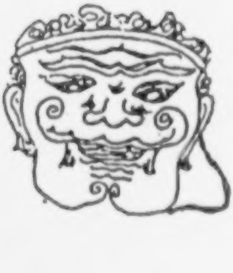
Sai Deav (a single-stringed gourd zither

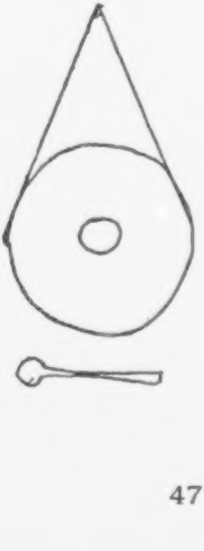
CHAYAN BAND











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Chapter IX

LITERATURE
PERFORMING ARTS
CRAFTS

LITERATURE

Roots of Khmer literature can be traced further back in time than those of many other Southeast Asian countries. Although composed in Sanskrit, the script was transcribed in Khmer letters and dated back to the second or third century A.D. Most Khmer literature was written on materials highly vulnerable to damage by climate, insects and occupying enemy forces.

The literature and the script owe much to Indic sources. The most important masterpiece translated from Pali was the entire series of *Tripitaka*, the basic document of Theravada Buddhism. The document had never been translated in full from Pali into any other language. This achievement was made under the leadership of the late Buddhist patriarch Chuon Nath, who was directly involved for some forty years in the work. The extensive translation was bound into 110 volumes of up to 900 pages each.

Another remarkable work was the publication of the Cambodian version of the *Ramayana*, a great epic of Hindu literature. The effort was sponsored by the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh. Ancient writings, especially the Buddhist holy scripture, were produced, handled and studied by monks only.

Differences between spoken and written Cambodian prose are substantial; the literary forms use archaisms and words borrowed from Sanskrit and Pali. These words are not known to the common man. Works of technical nature are also published in Cambodian and deal with subjects such as divination, astronomy and traditional medicine.

Cambodian poetry uses meter, assonance, rhyme (terminal and internal) and alliteration. Poetry uses more archaic and foreign terms than prose.

French literature was an important syllabus in secondary schools. The willingness to abandon the monarchial form of government by the Khmer leadership can be attributed to the influence of French classical literature.

Novels of modern time, written in Cambodian or French

(French was also an official language) reflect influences from abroad; but they deal mostly with ancient Khmer legends, historical events, love stories, and current domestic social matters. Newspapers and magazines publish short stories and poems in both Cambodian and French. Cambodian writers have their works published by private booksellers. The latter pay rather low for the manuscript since paper and printing costs are high. Moreover, Cambodia is not a nation of readers.

The opportunity for young dedicated writers to obtain an audience of reasonable size is quite limited. Outside of journalism, there are almost no professional writers in the country.

PERFORMING ARTS

The numerous *Apsaras* in the bas-reliefs of the ancient temples of Angkor give good testimony to the delight that Khmer rulers took in the dancing female beauty. The dancers of Angkor royal courts have also provided inspiration for the Thai classical dance performed up to contemporary days.

In the old times, the court ballet performed only for the royal circle, their guests and occasional tourists gathered at Angkor. Since the 1950's, the royal group was also sent on tour to the big cities around the world. The troupe also danced on ceremonial occasions, both Buddhist and royal. On exceptionally dry farming seasons, it would dance at the palace to induce spirits to provide rain for the rice crop.

The University of Fine Arts was established to preserve and develop, among others, the Khmer Classical Ballet.

The classical dance was always accompanied by an orchestra composed of typical Khmer musical instruments (already listed under MUSIC). The ensemble could be doubled to provide greater sound effect. There might be some singing, either solo or in group, in the classical ballet. The royal dances, as a rule, were not viewed by the general public.

Dancers of the Ballet Royal wore beautiful, highly decorated costumes including head-dresses similar to those worn by *apsaras* of Angkor bas-reliefs. Beside the classical dance proper, the royal troupe also performed dramatic scenes drawn upon the Hindu myths, mainly the *Ramayana* and Buddhist *Jataka* tales. Dance gestures involve gracious hand-works and some body and foot movements.

Less professional from the artistic point of view, but more numerous (several dozens in number), were other dance-drama groups called Bassak theatrical groups. They were named after a Cambodian province from which they originated which is now a part of South Vietnam. They also performed dance dramas representing episodes of the *Ramayana* and some Buddhist tales as well as the more popular indigenous legends, modern romances and satires. These groups showed influences from both India and China; and they performed only in the larger cities where large audiences helped keep the business alive. Performers were accorded very low pay and often had a side job.

The *yike*, a more rural and less elaborate dance drama form originating in Siemreap, showed a different style and setting. Such folkloric groups, generally maintained by amateurs performed for countryside audiences at local festivities. The accompanying musical group consisted of several large shallow drums and one or two two-stringed violins.

All three forms of dance drama were subject matters taught at the University of Fine Arts. Other subjects offered at this institution were folk dances, western ballet, acting, television show and movie making. Plays from Shakespeare, Molière and Corneille were highly praised by the educated few. Contemporary acting, movies and TV were relatively recent and showed limited success. The Fine Arts group frequently presented programs of music, dancing and plays on national television and radio.

Lively, rhythmic and colorful folk dances performed on stage by groups of skillful boys and girls were quite attractive for all types of audience. Among the most popular ones are the coconut dance, the fishing dance, and the *Krap* dance. The *Ramvong* (or circle dance) is a very popular one practiced by the majority of the rural population and is danced for a month or more as a part of the New Year celebration. Groups of mixed couples posture gracefully with their hands while stepping flirtatiously near their partners without touching each other. The Ramvong, also called *Lamthon*, is primarily for non-professionals.

CRAFTS

Before and mostly during the nineteenth century, artistic luxury objects were provided to the numerous members of royalty and the wealthy classes by Khmer artisans employed for the purpose. Silver and gold work was of very high quality. Jewelry pieces and little boxes which held the ingredients for betel-chewing were the most remarkable art objects. After the turn of the century, the making of these art pieces was abandoned little by little, as betel-chewing became less popular among the wealthy classes who also turned to the west for luxury items. Many professionals who had been engaged in craftmanship turned to agriculture for a living. A survey made toward the end of World War I showed that artisans numbered only over one hundred, and most no longer practiced their crafts.

The French administration undertook to save the crafts. It assembled craftsmen at the School of Fine Arts which was originally established for the revival and the preservation of Khmer crafts. They were employed as instructors to teach young craftsmen-trainees. The French took care not to interfere in the traditional apprenticeship system. A new generation of Khmer craftsmen was thus formed, but the result was rather uninspiring. Ancient themes were meticulously repeated and the target group was solely the tourists. Cambodian clientele was quite small since only a few could afford the products. Most craftsmen worked on copying standard items made by others and rarely added their own individual touches. The craftsmen generally enjoyed little social prestige.

The most practiced crafts included the working of silver and gold, the making of jewelry, the sculpture of ebony and other hard-woods, and stone carving. The objects became more and more functional: cigarette boxes, sugar and cream sets, make-up sets, flower pots, trophies, silver wares, letter-opener, etcetera. Designs were generally based on figures and floral patterns borrowed from the Angkor style. Local pottery making showed very little artistic design. Some other objects were mostly decorated; among these were musical instruments, oxcarts, the pirogues (racing canoes), rice-harvesting sickles, and so forth.

Among the folk arts, Cambodians took special pride in the making of silk items: the *hol*, the *phamuong*, the *sarong* and the scarf. Silk thread was produced by a kind of worm. Dying involved the use of native vegetable ingredients. Each piece of *hol* to be used for one Cambodian *sampot* was dyed and woven separately by hand so that no two garments were quite the same. Any one piece of those costumes would take several months to finish. The highly designed items were worn on special occasions only and were unaffordable for the poor majority.

Chapter X

IMPORTANT KHMER CEREMONIES

There exist many ceremonies celebrated by Cambodian families and communities. The two most remarkable ones continue to be the wedding ceremony and the funeral.

A. WEDDING CEREMONY

Preparations may take place several days before the actual wedding day(s). A wooden or steel frame is put in place on the front yard or on the street to support a canopy to serve as protection against the sun and rain. The whole setting is decorated with bright colors, lighting, palm leaves, etcetera.

On the morning of the first day comes the wedding procession. Dozens of participants carry trays of gifts from the bridegroom to the bride's family: jars and boxes of cookies and candies, fresh and canned fruits of all sorts, clothings, jewelry, meats, etcetera, carefully wrapped in bright colored cellophane.

Around nine o'clock in the morning, after the procession arrives at the bride's house, the ritual presentation of gifts begins. The interested parties, including the bride and bridegroom, are introduced to guests. There is an exchange of jewelry, not necessarily rings. A traditional musical band plays on while breakfast is served to guests along with the cookies and fruits just brought in.

The whole wedding ceremony is a series of ritual ceremonies namely *Kat saak, saut mon, ptim* with *bangvil popil, louk kantel, toang sbay, bok leak, psam damnek.* Many of these rituals are of Hinduist influence whereas others are of Buddhist influence. *Bok leak* and *kat saak* are meant to rid the young couple of shortcomings and bad luck and to give them blessings for a happy life. At *kat saak* ('to have a hair cut'), the bride and bridegroom dressed in their best traditional attire, much like the ones worn by Kings and Queens, sit in front of a decorated table. Respected couples, oftentimes relatives of either family, are invited to give the young couple a symbolic dash of hair cutting and combing to be followed by some perfume. All this is accompanied by the traditional music group's playing the "haircut" song. The symbolism is quite clear; long and undesirable hair is cut away so as to give the couple a new and clean hairdo; unfortunate things are thus removed by cleansing their minds so they can live a happy married life.

Saut mon, or prayer chanting, is nothing more than a religious ceremony. Five Buddhist monks are invited in to give the blessing. The bride, still dressed in gorgeous gold brocade and golden jewelry, appears once more from her room. The *achar*, the layman priest, acting as master of ceremony for the whole wedding, guides the audience in Buddhist chanting. The monks answer by reciting prayers at some length. All is designed to wash away the bad luck and to prepare the new episode for the new couple.

At sunset all the dining tables are ready to receive guests. Several hundred guests are invited for the banquet. The bride and bridegroom stand at the gate to greet the arriving guests who will be seated by groups of ten. A full course of dinner is then served item by item. Families and guests may go to a big restaurant for the banquet. However, cooks may be hired for the day to prepare the big dinner for everybody at the bride's house. A temporary outdoor kitchen is set up in the yard nearby to help them make the good food.

The banquet is entertained by an amateur western-type musical band playing old and new tunes with Cambodian or Latin beats. After about an hour of eating and drinking, the young couple, accompanied by well-dressed friends, goes around the tables to offer and light cigarettes for guests. This would be a last presentation of the bride and bridegroom to the invitees; at the same time they receive blessings from friends and relatives. Wedding gifts are mainly in the form of money so as to help cover the overall cost of the big feast. There will be music and dancing until dusk.

At three or four o'clock in the morning of the next day comes the *ptim* meaning sit down in pairs to pray. The *achar* asks that all divinities and all departed ancestors of the two families come and give blessings to the couple. For each appearance, the new couple dresses differently and always beautifully.

Honeymooning is celebrated there at the bride's house with more rites during the evening of the second day.

Any wedding ceremony in Cambodia is a time and energy consuming venture which costs a lot of money. It should be the most significant and joyful moment of anyone's life.

DEATH AND FUNERALS

Days or hours before a person passes away, his room is redecorated so as to be surrounded by white curtains and religious paintings normally representing Buddha. Just before the final moment, an *achar* or priest is invited to assist the process. The last three words a dying person should utter, whenever possible, are "*Buddha, Dharma, Sangha*" meaning "Buddha, His Teaching and the Clergy". By doing so the soul would be saved from the Inferno.

Before the body becomes stiff, family members give the dead person a bath, new clothes and insert a coin in his mouth. This is intended for those left behind. It spells out the fact that at death none of the fortune can be brought along, not even a penny. The head of the dead is directed toward the West. During the funeral procession the body is carried feet first. It must be carried horizontally at all times. The trip to the cremation place may be several miles long; it is done on foot or in cars. When the departed is a respected person, the funeral includes several hundred mourners and several musical bands.

The ceremony itself can last from one to seven days, depending on the wealth of the family, because guests from afar are fed three meals a day. The lighting of the crematory furnace is done by a member of the family. However, tradition is also shifting toward giving this honor to a respected person of the community.

After cremation, family members gather the remaining ashes to be washed in coconut juice and kept in an urn to be placed in a stupa at a pagoda. The family goes to the stupa to worship the dead at least once a year. The oldest son or daughter generally leads in the worshiping.

A remembrance ceremony is celebrated by the family at the seventh day after a person is dead, at the hundredth day, and every one year period.

Families with Chinese influence have their dead buried rather than cremated. There is one day of the year on which families go to the tomb to celebrate for the dead. There is a food offering and praying next to the tomb. Members of the family wish that the dead be happy and that he takes care of the living persons.

Chapter XI

KHMER HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS

Holidays of all sorts were treasured. The people have an acute sense of the dramatic, and their celebrations abounded with costumes, light, floats and parades. Singing is very popular, music and dancing are enjoyed, and fireworks remain a feature of every festival. Festive occasions are closely related to the Buddhist religion and the temple itself was often the scene of feasts and theatrical performances.

There is one festival in which the vast majority of Cambodians takes part: the New Year. According to Cambodian tradition, April is the first month of the year. The ritual New Year lasts for three days, normally from 13th through 15th of April. The actual date and time (up to the minute) are determined by an astrologer who calculates the exact moment when the new *Thevada* arrives to replace the out-going one. The *Thevada* has the responsibility of looking after the well being of mankind. While getting ready to welcome the new deity, most people spent their time in cleaning and decorating their home so as to ban evil spirits and disaster. Small altars holding a pot of flowers, some candle-sticks, and incenses dedicated to the New Thevada are placed in front of each house. Cambodians in the United States continue to celebrate the New Year but are not able to celebrate it exactly as they did in Cambodia. The next paragraphs describe the New Year as it was celebrated in Cambodia.

The first day of the New Year is called *Sangkran* Day. Several minutes before the Thevada "came down", candles and incenses were lit up and family members come to the altar and made their wishes.

In the second day called *Vannabad* Day, people built small sand mounds inside the pagoda and prayed for prosperity and happiness as numerous as the sand particles.

The third day is called *Laeung Sak* Day. On this day people, old and young, gathered at the temple to wash the statues of Buddha. They also bathed their parents and grand-parents to show gratitude to them. In doing so, they would gain more merits for themselves. On this day also, civil servants of higher ranks, wearing their best national dress, went to the Royal Palace to pay respects to the King of Cambodia. In return, the dedicated government employees were promoted; this is the meaning of *Laeung Sak*.

In the country side, folks played and danced for up to one full month. The traditional and popular games and dances during the New Year Celebration included *Ramvong*, folk theater and *Yike* in the open air, *Chol Chhoung, Bah Angkonh, Teanh Proat, Trot, Bach Tuc*, modern type parties and dancing, etcetera.

The New Year is the time to pray and to plan for a better new life during the upcoming year. It was also a time to pay visits to relatives and friends; the people could since work was at its lowest as rice harvest was done and schools were in summer recess.

There were three official Buddhist holidays. Two were of two days' duration but involved only a half-day's release from work each day. The first of the series, occurring in January or February, was *Meak Bochia*, wich commemorated the last sermon of the Buddha. The second was *Pisakh Bochia* in April or May; it was the triple anniversary of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and entry into *Nirvana*.

The remaining official Buddhist ceremony, held in September or October, was *Prachum Ben*, which lasted for three days. At this time, offerings were made to the monks for the benefit of the dead. In addition to these formally designated national religious holidays, there was the season of the *Kathen*, in October and November. During the season, each monastery received at least one *Kathen*. On the day set, villagers bearing gifts to the monks and the pagoda joined in a procession.

Secular holidays were determined by the Christian calendar and were full holidays for nationals as well as foreigners. For 1972, these holidays included Labor Day on May 1, National Day on October 9, United Nations Day on October 24, Independence Day on November 9, and Western New Year on January 1.

There were days of special occasion, such as the arrival of the President of a friendly or important nation, which were designated official holidays.

Among the most important festivals during the "sixties" which were presided over by the Chief of State were the Plowing of the Sacred Furrow, which occurred in May at the beginning of the rainy season, and the Water Festival, which celebrated the reversal of the current in the Tonle Sap River. The Water Festival occurred in October or November. Both of these festivals were eliminated after 1970.

Official holidays were numerous. Those based on lunar calendar varied somewhat from year to year in terms of Western calendar.

The Department of Labor and Social Action published lists of holidays applicable to workers in the private sector; the Council of Ministers published lists of holidays for government offices. These official holidays were granted with full pay to civil servants and employees of private and mixed industries.

One of the most colorful festivals was the Chinese New Year. The celebration lasted for four days in the last of January or beginning of February, but preparations began weeks in advance. Most shops closed down for the occasion. Children were given all kinds of gifts, toys, and noisemakers such as firecrackers; they put on their new clothes and made every opportunity to have fun. The most exciting moments would be watching the "Dragon Dance". A large paper dragon was activated by several boys and followed by a group of drummers and musicians. The Dragon would dance in the front of each house which was willing to pay some fees. It was believed that good luck was thus brought in the house. Other parades march down the streets with altars of deities, magicians, colorful costumes, animals flowers, gongs, and drums; all chased out the demons of the past year and welcomed the good spirit of the new.

The happy and cheerful nature of the Cambodian people is well reflected in the way they celebrated their festivals and holidays.

Chapter XII

RECREATION AND LEISURE

Following are descriptions of some games played by Cambodian adults and children.

CHHUONG

Chhuong is played with a scarf rolled up to make a ball. The scarf ball is tossed back and forth between two teams– the girls' team and boys' team. Losers are to sing a song or to give the winners a piggy-back ride, and the like.

SEI

Sei is one of the most popular game among the Cambodian people. "*Sei*" refers to that object used for kicking or hitting. The word also refers to the game itself. The object of the game is to try to keep the *Sei* in the air as long as possible. Besides a lot of practice, a good player must have a high degree of concentration, a perfect body balance and coordination, speed, alertness and endurance.

One type of *Sei* is made out of feathers and large, dry fish scales. Cardboard or leather may the substituted for the latter. The final shape of such *Sei* is close to that of a bird or shuttlecock used in badminton. Another type of *Sei* is made of palm leaf-stalk woven into a hollow round ball.

Children learning to play the game may just hit the object with their palms, whereas adults kick it with their feet. A typical party may consist of 4 to 8 persons standing in circle, about 4 to 6 feet from each other and facing inside. One player starts by tossing the *Sei* to a player on the opposite side. The player to whom the *Sei* is tossed kicks it to another player of his choice. There is a lot of fun and laughter during each game. Good players can keep the *Sei* in the air for several minutes each time. Any part of the body, such as forehead, shoulder, chest, knee, etcetera, can be used except the hand in an adult team. The player who lets the *Sei* hit the ground or be "dead" must be penalized in some way such as having all other players pinch his nose.

LEAK KANSAENG

Leak Kansaeng, meaning "scarf hiding", is a game played by Cambodian children. It was popular in the countryside and played mostly under the moonlight. The purpose of the game is to teach the children to be alert and aware of their surroundings. The only object needed is a piece of cloth or a scarf: the *Kansaeng*.

To play the game, a group of children sit in a circle facing inside. A child is chosen to be the runner who goes around the circle. He then drops the scarf behind one of the seated children and continue to run around the circle. The child having the scarf behind him will pick it up and start to chase the runner. The runner is "out" if he is caught before reaching the place vacated by the chaser. On the other hand, when the runner succeeds in arriving at the vacated spot before getting tapped from behind, the chaser himself is "out" and becomes the new runner.

In case the child behind whom the scarf is hidden does not know it is there, the runner will make the round and tap the child on the back. That makes the latter one "out" and means he must be the next runner.

During the runner's trip around the circle, every body sings the *Leak Kansaeng* song.

ANGKUNH

Angkunh is a hard brown nut with a roundish and rather flat shape which measures about 2 to 3 inches across. The game played by the Cambodian people using this nut is also called *Angkunh*.

The game can be played by two or more players, young or adult. Participants can be divided into a male and a female team. Each team should have five to fifteen nuts. At the start of a game, five nuts considered as targets are arranged is such a way that four occupy the corners of a square with one in the middle. The playing team should stand about fifteen feet from the target area. Each player should try to score by rolling his/her nut toward the target nuts. A point is scored when a target nut is hit in this manner. A set of a game is either over for any one team which has used up all the nuts to be rolled or when the center target nut is hit. Points are then added up and the score recorded. Then comes the time for the other team to repeat the same thing. The team or player scoring the most points after both teams have finished is the winner, of course. Depending on pre-arranged agreements, the nuts can be rolled over by hand or by foot.

For best results, *Angkunh* should be played on relatively smooth surfaces. This game is even more popular during the New Year season, when children and adults play at length for up to several months in public places such as pagoda play grounds.

Defeated players may get pinched on the nose or hit on the knee with the nut by the winning team depending on the agreements.

REK

Rek is a war game that started about the second century and is very popular among the Cambodian people. This game consists of a 8 x 8 square game board and two armies made up of 1 king and 15 soldiers each. Two or more persons can play on each side, but only one piece can be moved at a time. The object of this game is to capture the opposing king by strategically moving the pieces.

To start the game the soldiers and king are arranged as follows:

s	s	s	s	s	s	s	s
k	s	s	s	s	s	s	s
s	s	s	s	s	s	s	k
s	s	s	s	s	s	s	s

One side will start the game by moving a piece forward. A piece may be moved as many spaces as there are vacant. The movement of the pieces can only be in a horizontal or vertical direction and not in a diagonal direction (see arrows below). There is no jumping of any piece on the board.

HORIZONTAL
VERTICAL
DIAGONAL

There are two ways to capture the enemy:

1. By placing one of your pieces between two opposing pieces.
2. By surrounding one or more pieces so your opponent can not make another move.

TEANH-PREAT

Teanh-preat (Tug-of-War) is the game played with a snake. It is not a real snake, of course, but several strands of rope plaited like a snake.

The snake is one of the gods in the Khmer mythology, and if one has ever visited the temple of Angkor Wat, one will find this snake carved in the stone at all the bas-relief along the wall of Angkor Wat which was built in the first half of the 12th century.

a) The players stand around and choose the captains of their teams. Teams can be mixed males and females. They can be one of males and one of females.
b) The snake is stretched out straight on the ground with equal amounts on either side of a line.
c) The teams take up their positions facing each other on either side of the line.
d) The referee's whistle is in his mouth, and as soon as both sides are ready, the tussle will begin.
e) The team wins which pulls the first person or/the other team across the line.

EXAMPLE OF LEISURE READING: *THE WOLF*

Once upon a time, a wolf started the day by looking for some prey and finally arrived at a muddy pond with a lot of fish and crayfish. The wolf thought that was his lucky day since he caught many crayfish in no time at all.

A crayfish told the wolf: " We will be your food for today but we won't taste any good as we are all covered with mud. It would be better for you to clean us first by bringing us to a clear water pond."

"How can I bring all of you ?" the wolf asked.

The crayfish answered, "You have to lie down in the water and we will grab onto your hair. This way you can bring us all in not many trips".

The greedy wolf followed the advice of the crayfish and *made several trips back and forth, until all the fish, crayfish, and crabs were in the clear water.*

When the fish, crayfish, and crabs knew that all their friends and relatives were finally brought to the clear water, all of them dived to the safety of the deep water. The wolf watched all of them disappear into the deep water and this made him very angry. The angry wolf persuaded all of the large animals, like the tiger, the elephant, the rhinoceros, etc., to help drain the lake so that he could get the fish, crayfish, and crabs. The pythons served as dikes and the other animals proceded to drain the water.

The animals in the water gathered with fear that the wolf would get them all when the water got low enough.

A fish said: "I know that a rabbit has saved many from death and danger. I will go and find him and ask for help." The fish slipped away one night and searched for the rabbit. Finally, the fish met the rabbit.

— "Where are you going?" asked the rabbit.

— "I am glad to see you. You are admired throughout the forests for your intellegence, kindness, and shrewdness. It is also said that you will help those that are in trouble," replied the fish.

— "What is your problem?" asked the rabbit.

— All the large animals and birds are trying to drain the lake so the angry wolf can eat all of my friends that are hiding at the bottom of the lake. If you can help us we will be very grateful to you and we will never forget your kindness," replied the fish.

The rabbit thought for a while and then told the fish: "Go back to your friends and tell them I will do my best to help."

After returning to the lake, the fish told the others and they were all delighted and relieved.

The next morning, the rabbit arrived and stood watching the large animals and birds drain the water from the lake. The rabbit had brought a leaf that was eaten by worms and showed it to the large animals.

Then the rabbit shouted: "Look, everyone! This is a message from the God King. The God King has said that he is coming to this world to cut the wings of eagles, the beaks of cranes, to chop the heads of wolves and pull the tusks of the elephants."

After hearing these threatening words all the larger animals and birds ran into the forest. In the confusion, some animals were stepped on and others that could not escape were drowned and became food for the fish and crayfish in the lake.

From then on, all the animals respected and regarded the rabbits as scholars.

Cambodian Proverbs:

> *"Death or survival depends on the tongue."*
>
> *"One who can turn the tongue can turn the world."*

Appendix

Cambodian New Year

Unlike the Chinese or the European New Years, Cambodian New Year's Day occurs on April 13th or sometimes on April 14th each year.

According to various documents and ancient stories, the Cambodians have had two types of calendars: the lunar and the solar.

THE LUNAR

MONTH NAME	SYMBOL		
1. *Miggage*	(deer)	29 days	November-December
2. *Boss*	(crab)	30 days	December-January
3. *Miak*	(monkey)	29 days	January-February
4. *Phalkun*	(ox)	30 days	February-March
5. *Chetr*	(tiger)	29 days	March-April
6. *Pisakh*	(buffalo)	30 days	April-May
7. *Ches**	(goat)	29-30 da.	May-June
8. *Asadh*	(lion)	30 days	June-July
9. *Srap*	(Flower)	29 days	July-August
10. *Phatrabod*	(rhino)	30 days	August-September
11. *Assoch*	(horse)	29 days	September-October
12. *Kaddik*	(chicken)	30 days	October-November

The lunar year, which has twelve months, has only 354 days.

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* The year that one day is added during the month of *Ches* has 355 days

THE SOLAR

The solar year has 12 months and 365 days, or sometimes 366 days:

MONTH NAME	SYMBOL		
1. *Mesa*	(sheep, goat)	30 days	April
2. *Usaphia*	(ox)	31 days	May
3. *Mithona*	(couple)	30 days	June
4. *Kakkada*	(crab)	31 days	July
5. *Seiha*	(lion)	31 days	August
6. *Kannha*	(girl)	30 days	September
7. *Tola*	(scale)	31 days	October
8. *Vichika*	(scorpion)	30 days	November
9. *Thnu*	(arrow)	31 days	December
10. Makara	(shark)	31 days	January
11. Kompha	(jar)	28 or 29 days	February
12. Mina	(fish)	31 days	March

It has been noted that the Gregorian calendar was introduced in Cambodia during the French period, but the Cambodians never celebrated their New Year's Day on the first of January.

DAYS OF THE WEEK

1. *Atit*	Sunday
2. *Chand*	Monday
3. *Angkiar*	Tuesday

4. *Puth*	Wednesday
5. *Prahas*	Thursday
6. *Sok*	Friday
7. *Sao*	Saturday

There are 24 hours in a day. Each day starts at midnight and end at midnight (12 P.M.)

YEARS

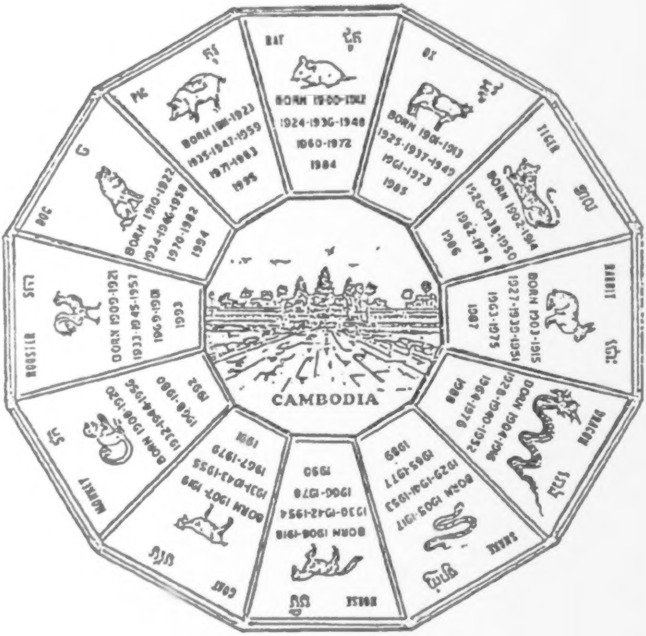
NAME	SYMBOL
1. *Chout*	(rat)
2. *Chlov*	(ox)
3. *Khal*	(tiger)
4. *Thas*	(rabbit)
5. *Rong*	(dragon)
6. *Msanh*	(serpent)
7. *Mami*	(horse)
8. *Mame*	(goat)
9. *Vak*	(monkey)
10. *Raka*	(rooster)
11. *Cha*	(dog)
12. *Kol*	(boar)

During the pre-Angkor period (550 A.D. to 1432 A.D.) the Cambodian New Year began in the month of *Miggase* (November-December) of each year. *Miggase* is the first month and *Kaddik* the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. Nevertheless, the New Year's celebration never took place in the first month (*Miggage*).

From the post-Angkor period, 1432-1863 A.D., to the present day, Cambodians have used two types of calendar, lunar and solar. According to their own solar calendar, their New Year's Day starts in the month of Chetr (April 13th or sometimes 14th of each year).

The stone inscription at the old temple of Preah Khan also indicates that New Year's ceremonies were held in the month of *Chetr*. Moreover, a Chinese scholar, Tcheou-Ta-Kouan, who visited Cambodia in 1295-1297, described in his research book that in the month of *Chetr* (April), Cambodians celebrated their festival. During the festival, they played a game called Chhoung. He further observed people bringing with them the Buddha statues to the temples to give them their annual bath.

CAMBODIAN YEARS


RAT
BORN 1900-1912
1924-1936-1948
1960-1972
1984
OX
BORN 1901-1913
1925-1937-1949
1961-1973
1985
TIGER
BORN 1902-1914
1926-1938-1950
1962-1974
1986
RABBIT
BORN 1903-1915
1927-1939-1951
1963-1975
1987
DRAGON
BORN 1904-1916
1928-1940-1952
1964-1976
1988
SNAKE
BORN 1905-1917
1929-1941-1953
1965-1977
1989
HORSE
BORN 1906-1918
1930-1942-1954
1966-1978
1990
GOAT
BORN 1907-1919
1931-1943-1955
1967-1979
1991
MONKEY
BORN 1908-1920
1932-1944-1956
1968-1980
1992
ROOSTER
BORN 1909-1921
1933-1945-1957
1969-1981
1993
DOG
BORN 1910-1922
1934-1946-1958
1970-1982
1994
PIG
BORN 1911-1923
1935-1947-1959
1971-1983
1995
CAMBODIA

What do the Cambodians do during the New Year's holidays?

By the New Year, they must have all types of foods ready and have some new clothing and other materials such as candles, incense sticks, special paper to decorate the house. They clean the house and decorate it with flags, flowers, lanterns, and so on. In front of the house, they set a table filled with candles, incense sticks, perfume and fruits to receive new *Devada* (Angel or God).

Throughout the entire country, the Khmer people enjoy their New Year's ceremonies for at least three days beginning on April 13th, or sometimes April 14th. In some parts of the country, people play popular games, popular music and folk dances even several days before and after the New Year's Day. They observe the New Year's celebration according to the season of *Sankrant* (the season for sacrifice of the New Year in accordance with the Cambodian solar calendar).

Three Important Days in the New Year:

1. The first day (*Sankrant* Day) is the day of entry into New Year.
2. The second day (*Vanabad* Day) is the middle day which divides the old year and the new year.
3. The third day (*Thngai-loeung-sak*) is the day to which a new era is added.

During the first day of the New Year in particular, the Khmers solemnly receive the new Devada who has the responsibility of looking after the well-being of mankind for a year.

Religion has a deep root in the Khmer traditional society not only on the artistic and cultural life but it also shaped the personality and the mentality of the Khmer people entirely. The pagoda, the supreme and sacred place of Buddhism, is considered the pillar of the Khmer society. Everybody spends one's life all around it. The Khmer pagoda is the best example of a social, medical, spiritual and artistic center of the Khmer people. All private or socio-economic problems in the community usually find their satisfactory solution in the pagoda. Therefore, during a three-day New Year celebration, the Khmers go to the pagoda bringing food and some offering to the Buddhist monks. They request that the monks recite and preach the Buddha's doctrines. They, especially on the third day of the New Year, give an annual bath not only to Buddha statues, but also to the monks, the elderly people and the teachers. The monks are invited to chant the Dharma in order to consecrate good deeds to the dead.

In addition, they offer some presents such as clothes, victual and money to people who are highly respected such as parents, grandparents, or elderly people. Charity in this manner is also given to the poor during the New Year time.

During the Khmer New Year's holidays, some people like to pay a visit to historical places such as the temples of Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, etcetera, while others prefer to visit their relatives. In the countryside, people walk from one village to another in order to play games, to watch dances or to dance themselves. Numerous popular games are played throughout the whole country.

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KHAMCHONG LUANGPRASEUT

LAOS CULTURALLY SPEAKING

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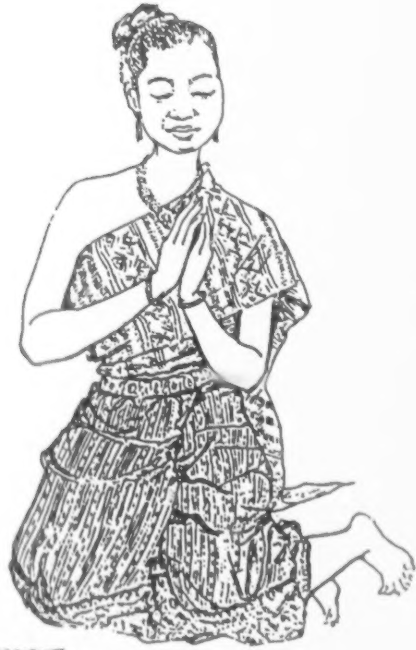
Laos, for the last six hundred years, has been known to her people as *RASSANACHAK LANXANG HOM KHAO*, otherwise *THE KINGDOM OF A MILLION ELEPHANTS UNDER THE WHITE PARASOL.* Laos has always been a land of multi-ethnic culture. By necessity, this part of *LAOS CULTURALLY SPEAKING* will deal with the LAO and their culture, exclusively.



SABAAI DEE
HELLO
I AM A LAO.
HOW DO YOU DO?

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

You have probably noticed that the word "Introduction" was written down *three* times. If so, you might have already asked yourself the question "why?" If you have done that, and further tried to discover or develop within yourself all possible reasonings behind that intriguing number without being able to decide which one would be the right answer, then I must presume that you had been an Asian at least once in your previous lives, possibly as an erudite pundit!

But if you have not, don't let that bother you now. Anyway, you are graciously invited to cross the border into an Oriental way of thinking. In fact, in the Asian mind all details, while apparently meaningless to a Westerner, and all nuances, no matter how small they seem to be, may frequently reflect a more profound philosophical thought or a very humane motivation in the person who expresses them. You will spot many such details in your verbal and non-verbal communication with Laotians or Asians in general. Sometimes they may reveal to you the existence of another and totally different system of values, even a different concept of the whole universe. Please pay close attention to the numbers, the body-language, and the food. They contain many revealing details in those aspects mentioned above.

The next twelve chapters of rather short narratives will make a sincere attempt to draw your attention to the cultural particularity of the Lao, a major ethnic entity in Southeast Asia today. In their recent exodus, 100,000 Lao people have reached the United States of America. You will find out, if you do not already know, that in Laos, not all the Laotians are ethnically Lao and speak Lao (the national and official language of Laos), and that the Lao are not culturally linked to China but to India. Laos is not a rich country in terms of materialistic wealth, but you will find smiling people all over the land. It was reported quite often that visiting or traveling foreigners could easily tell when they had entered the territory of the *Kingdom of A Million Elephants* because Laotians smile. Is there any hidden philosophy behind those smiling faces? What is the traditional Lao life style in remote villages? How is the Lao family really structured? What are the implications of all this for the education of the Lao children in American schools? These and other questions will bring about many other thoughts and reflections of my own which, hopefully, will provide you with some guidance in understanding the Lao culture in general, and perhaps minimum assistance to your noble teaching assignment.

To be closer to the Asian philosophical mood, let's go back to the numbers for a while. They are so different in Asian cultures. The number *three*, for instance, is exceptionally revealing. It tells us how the traditional Chinese perceive their universe. Heaven is on the top, the Earth on the bottom, and the people are in between. The Chinese reverence, with three traditional bows of the head, reflects, par excellence, their concept of reality. Another example: before coming to say their proper prayer, all Buddhist laymen would kneel down three times, each time reciting the same and identical *namo tassa...* formula. However, each time they kneel down they address themselves to a different authority. The first *namo* reverence is always directed to the Buddha himself, the second goes to the Holy Script containing the Buddhist Teachings, and the third and last reverence goes to the bonzes (Buddhist monks). Clearly this order gives us an idea of what the hierarchy system looks like in Buddhism. Moreover, it tells us the methodology and dialectics of a Buddhist mind. The Lao, not accidentally, gave a name to this Buddhist principle known as the *three diamonds*. One last example, the use of sacred threads with mystical knots for curing or self-protecting purposes, is common to the folklore of many human races. However in India, a Brahman from Madras will usually wind a cord of threads three times round his knee before he makes his special knot. The cord itself must be made of three fine threads and twisted together.

Realistic? Analytical or Mystical? Whatever we may think of the numbers, we must know that in many Asian cultures some of the numbers do have a controlling and commanding power over various aspects of the human lives of the natives.

Just a last word of warning before we set our foot on the land of the smiling Lao and enter their universe. Go in peace and *forget your time*. Time, in the sense of Western civilization, has very little meaning to the basic patterns of the traditional Lao values. Certainly not the amount of tic-tocs, not the months nor even years are important in judging the life of a human being on earth. To a very traditional Lao mind, precisely, it is not time that makes a human's life more valuable. The life itself and its achievements impart a value to any given time.

Many of the Lao traditions and values are supreme. As you read the following pages on a few aspects of the Lao culture, try to sympathize with some or even identify yourself with parts of them. We know very little about each other, but we do know that human races, while differing from one another in cultural practices, do have the same basic earthly concerns, namely: the safety for life, the need for cooperation, the sense of what is beautiful, and the necessity to indicate affection for loved ones.

Finally, if you seem to have the impression that the Lao actually are relatively unaffected by the Western civilization, you are absolutely right. Furthermore, if you cannot associate their miserable life with their smiling faces, there is nothing wrong with you. They smile because they are Lao. Is that not a reason?

Chapter I

LAO, LAOS, AND LAOTIANS

In 1967, after an extensive tour across the region, a well-known American columnist decided to publish a book on Southeast Asia. The book which was called *Southeast Asia* contains many enlightening details. As you read what the author had to say about Southeast Asians, listen carefully to his frustration. He wrote:

> *When a Thai or Vietnamese farmer is asked where his people originated, he is apt to reply that they have always lived in this village because he can, after all, remember his grandfather. Throughout Southeast Asia tradition may be supreme, but time has little meaning. Early Chinese and European travelers who roamed this region kept records, now important sources for Western scholars, but the Southeast Asian themselves were indifferent to history. What they knew or cared about in the past came down to them not in any systematic account, but in myths and legends that were, to their ears, just awesome or charming or literary magic.*

That frustrated American was Mr. Stanley Karnow. Mr. Karnow's reaction to our reality was most sincere. It is very apparent that the most important and pressing factors for him, as a Westerner, were factual information and *time*. Unfortunately, not too many people sense that Asian farmers actually live their lives and do not measure time. The majority of Asians would like to give sense to their own lives. Time is no obstacle because they have their whole lives to achieve their goals. If they cannot accomplish everything in this life, they believe they will improve the situation in the next life. There are many things that an Asian wishes to accomplish in his present life, but he will not attempt to make history out of his own life. Their existence is history itself. In that sense, the Southeast Asians are certainly not so indifferent to history as they might appear to be at the first sight.

Many of Mr. Karnow's expressed thoughts actually reflect the true nature of the problems with which any scholar would encounter in Southeast Asia, and perhaps not only in Southeast Asia. Mr. Karnow is no stranger to the Laotians and he is their friend. I had the pleasure to meet him six years ago, right here, in Santa Ana. He was about to publish a 6,000 word long article on the Hmong people, my other highly regarded compatriots. We were discussing the Hmong, as refugees, and problems related to their resettlement in the United States. I always view the Hmong as a dynamic people. Perhaps we will have other occasions to look more closely into their cultural and historical background and to share ideas as to what should be or could be expected of them in terms of contribution to this great and generous nation.

Indeed, the past of the Laotians did not come down to us in any systematic account. May they, however, hope that in a more distant future their present uneasy situation, not always generated by the Laotian themselves, will be thoroughly and accurately recorded so that *history* can never again be used to justify the self-expansionist purposes of nations? Right now, however, let's get ourselves ready for our planned excursion into the Lao culture.

WHERE DID THE LAO ORIGINATE FROM?

Many Lao, I am afraid, won't be able to tell you their grandparents' names because they really don't know them. If some do, don't expect them to be better informed than the others about the Lao people and how, in the distant past, they came about to resettle themselves in the places where they are now. As a matter of fact, nobody knows the exact origins of the Lao people. For many generations, the Lao were told by Western historians, mostly French or French born, that their Lao ancestors came from the Mongolian mountains, had lived in China and traveled southwards, and then finally had crossed the Chinese border to install themselves in a territory which is more or less covered by present-day Laos.

Records and a multitude of evidences, mainly Chinese, were produced to support such a thesis. Most recently, however, by applying very complicated linguistic tools, some American researchers have concluded to the great surprise of all that the Lao as well as all the Tai ethnic groups did not come from China nor Mongolia. They were first born, according to the same source, in an area called *Muong Theng*. Muong Theng used to be a part of Laos and it means, in the Lao language, *Paradise Country*. The Lao tradition also says that the Lao people originated in that valley. Subsequently, Muong Theng, the once Lao *Paradise Country*, has become a North Vietnamese town under a new name: Dien Bien Phu. Dien Bien Phu could very well mean *Hell Country* to the French because a major and decisive battle was fought there in 1954. The outcome? It was the political requiem of French colonial power in Indochina.

I do not know how much credit could be given this American theory on the historical birth place of the Lao people; nor can I tell how well the Lao legend itself is founded. Anyway, not too many years ago, an extraordinary archaeological discovery in Northeast Thailand unearthed pots or urns which are said to be more than five thousand years old. Moreover, grains of rice were found in those pots. I visited the Ban Xieng archaeological site, near the town of Udorn, in late 1974 and exchanged a few words with an American archaeologist from the University of Pennsylvania doing research over there. He was quite confident about the earlier reported existence of those grains. Well, if the rice in the 5,000 year old pot is a true story, the implications could be very far reaching. The Lao and other Indochinese peoples could thus be older than the Chinese themselves because the Chinese had started to eat rice at a much later date. It may also explain why rice is not so popular in far northern regions of China while it is the main dish in the South.

Anyway, many Lao certainly wish the American theory were true. Their pride and peaceful image are at stake. Pride because the Lao may then claim that they came from nowhere. Relief, because the Lao are tired of wars and atrocities and don't like to be reminded by history textbooks that their ancestors might have been invaders and had to chase the many Kha tribes and the Chams into the highlands so that the Lao themselves could have the rivers and the fertile plains for their own existence. Many Lao cannot know how much they owe other Laotians (Kha, Khmu, Iu-Mien,...) for their own existence. Therefore, those Lao who know about themselves also know that the past cannot be corrected but they sincerely wish the future to be wide open.

WHO ARE THE LAO?

The word *Lao* has many meanings. *Lao*, as a noun, means (1) an ethnic entity belonging to the Tai family in Southeast Asia, (2) the language spoken by the Lao ethnic entity, and (3) the person belonging to the Lao ethnic group.

The Lao, *as an ethnic entity*, is very closely linked to the Siamese. Today the Siamese call themselves Thai. Actually, the Lao, the Siamese or the Black Tais are all *Thai*. The Lao were traditionally called *the Laotian Thai* and the Siamese, *the Siamese Thai*. However, since the Kingdom of Siam has just recently become Thailand (1939) and, to avoid unnecessary semantic confusion, the term *Tai* was created to replace the traditional spelling *Thai*. Some scholars prefer *T'ai* to *Tai*, but, fortunately, it really has the same meaning.

The Lao, *as a language*, is a written language. Lao is the national and official language of Laos (Article 6, Constitution). Lao is spoken by approximately twenty million people in Southeast Asia. Only two million of them are inside Laos (Lao has a total population of about four million). Surprised? Sixteen million are in Northeast Thailand while the other Lao speakers are in all neighboring countries.

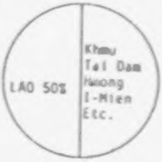
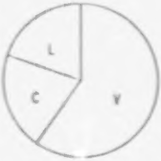
Many centuries ago, the literary Lao language was so rich in style, vocabulary, and technicality that it was elaborate enough to sense and faithfully describe the splendor of the ancient Hindu literature. Therefore, in early days the Lao language could even give birth to its own Lao version of the celebrated *Ramayana*. History has changed all that. No literary books of quality were written in Lao in the last 200 years. Much harm has been done to the Lao language under the French colonial administration. In the late sixties, the United States Agency for International Development undertook a very substantial step to try to reverse the situation. Four million Lao textbooks were published and a whole secondary educational program entitled "Fangum System" was taught in the native language. Nevertheless, the Lao language has suffered too much and too long. Consequently, as it stands today, the Lao language may not fulfill even the basic needs of educational curriculum beyond the junior high school level.

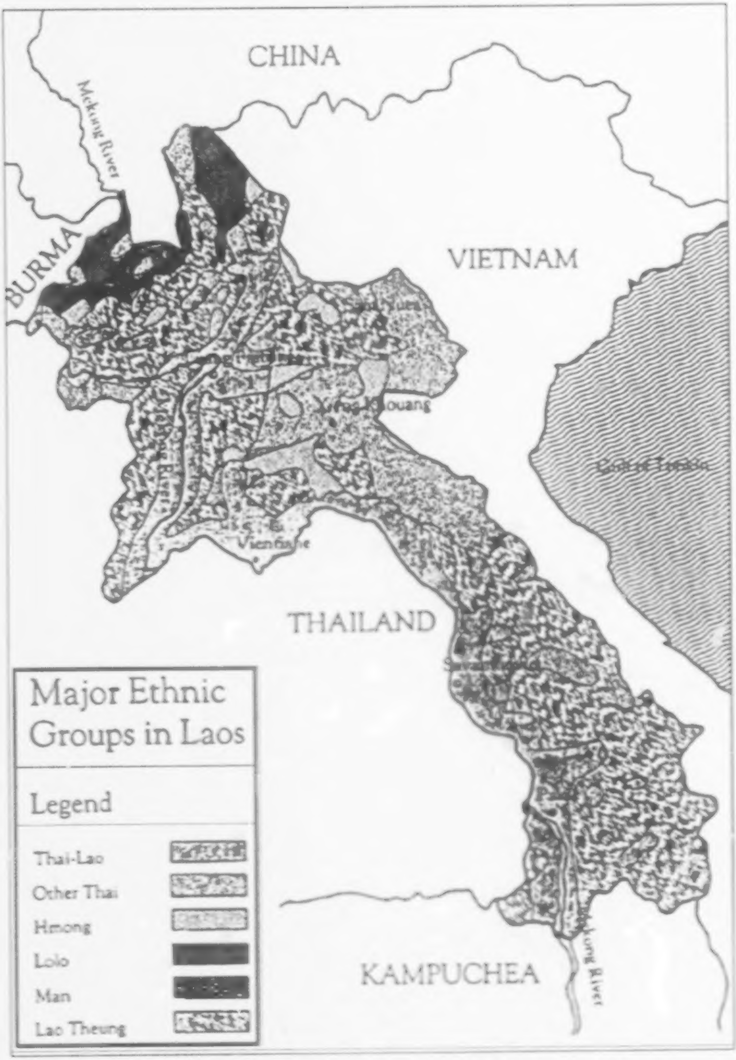
This is the main reason why the lack of qualified translators and writers of the Lao language is so visible and painfully felt in all school districts throughout the United States. There is no doubt in my mind that the Lao language is in a deep crisis. The absence of Lao books and readable newspapers in the United States is more than symptomatic. Yet the language is so beautiful and so poetic. Listen to the word *thank you* in Lao. It sounds like *khop chai*. *Khop* means *the frame*, and *chai* means *the heart*. It paints gratitude with charming colors by saying *You are going to be remembered in the frame of my heart*. A father in-law is called *Pho ta*, the *father with eyes* while a mother in-law is called *Mae naai* or *the mother with orders*. How can a family situation be more explicitly describable? There are approximately one hundred thousand Laotian refugees in the United States. This number is self-explanatory as to the need for the language itself. May I hope that you and your friends would express your sympathy in an eventual undertaking to revive this beautiful language in this beautiful land?

The Lao, *as a person*, differs in many ways from other citizens of Laos descending from non-Lao origin. A Lao has a long, long name. If possible, he prefers to eat sticky rice three times a day. Fish, vegetables and a large quantity hot peppers are the usual ingredients of his menu. His beloved musical instrument is called the *khen*, a mouth organ made of bamboo tubes which he plays in evening courting-sessions (social activity hours). A Lao is not a great traveller and traditionally cannot live too far away from the river, any river. Rivers not only provide the Lao with food, they are their "freeways" and have substantially shaped their way of life. The Lao systematically pursue their two most important goals in life: religious merit for the sake of an eventual future life, and personal pleasure on earth for a more practical purpose of life. Flexibility and relativity are important elements in a Lao mind. They produce that moderation in attitude which is so characteristic of the Lao people. The smiling faces, already mentioned earlier, are the expression of the same philosophy.

The word *Lao, as an adjective*, should not be mistaken with another adjective: *Laotian*. The first denotes qualities or disqualities of the Lao ethnics and only the Lao ethnics. The second denotes the qualities and disqualities of the Laotians, which includes every citizen of Laos, whether he or she has descended from a Lao or non-Lao origin. For instance, Laotian food may consist of many kinds of food from different ethnic groups, but the Lao food has to be really Lao. *Padek*, a strongly smelling fermented fish is a Lao delight which not every Laotian can eat. A plain-water soup consisting of only fresh water in a bowl is very popular among the Hmong people. You may call it a Laotian soup because a Hmong is a Laotian. But actually, no Lao that I know has fully appreciated the freshness and the cooling effect of the water mixed with rice in a bowl. The Lao would always says it is a Hmong soup.

You have learned what is Lao and what is not Lao. Therefore, you may no longer say *Do you speak Laotian?* Instead, you will ask *Do you speak Lao?* because there is no Laotian language, but there are Laotian languages. The Hmong tongue as well as Khmu, Iu-Mien, Tai, etc. are all Laotian languages. Also, you will no longer ask a person if she or he is a "Laotian or Hmong?" because a Hmong from Laos is a Laotian. The right question should be: *Are you a Laotian*? If the person says *Yes*, and if you would like to know more of the person's cultural background or language, then ask: *Are you a Lao or a Hmong or a Khmu etc...* The same thing will apply to songs, musical instruments and garments. This is a purely semantic convention. Not everyone agrees upon it, but I sincerely hope this short discussion will assist you to see the difference between the various ethnic groups from Laos. The Lao, Khmu, Hmong etc... are Laotians. The Laotians are Indochinese, so are the Cambodians and the Vietnamese. The Indochinese are Southeast Asians, the Indonesians are Southeast Asians as well, but they are not Indochinese. Indochina is a region. Indonesia is a country. The chart next page is just a memo intended to clear up any possible confusion in these terminologies. Please read from left to right.

Country or Region	LAOS	INDOCHINA : Three countries	SOUTHEAST ASIA : Nine countries.
People	LAOTIANS	INDOCHINESE	SOUTHEAST ASIANS.
Ethnicity and Citizenship		CAMBODIANS (C) 69,898 sq.m. LAOTIANS (L) 91,430 sq.m. VIETNAMESE (V) 128,052 sq.m. 	BURMESE: 35,306,189 CAMBODIANS : 6,684,000 FILIPINOS : 53,170,000 INDONESIANS : 161,579,500 LAOTIANS: 4,033,000 MALAYSIANS : 15,269,600 SINGAPOREANS : 2,529,100 THAIS : 49,515,100 VIETNAMESE : 52,741,766
Population in 1984.	4,033,000	63,458,766	380,828,255
Location		Laos Cambodi Vietnam	
Area in sq. m.	91,430	289,380	1,733,444
National official language	LAO	KHMER (C) LAO (L) VIETNAMESE(V)	


CHINA
Mekong River
BURMA
VIETNAM
Xieng Khouang
Gulf of Tonkin
Vientiane
THAILAND
KAMPUCHEA
Mekong River
Major Ethnic Groups in Laos
Legend
Thai-Lao
Other Thai
Hmong
Lolo
Man
Lao Theung

SOUTHEAST ASIA CHRONICLE ISSUE NO. 73—1980

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LAOS, POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

The analysis of all major problems of Laos lies beyond the scope of our present cultural materials. However, some basic understandings of the Laotian political and economic systems are necessary to assist us in our findings about the Lao culture. The following preliminary notes should provide you with a few ideas.

1. Laos is not Switzerland. *Not to have* an access to the sea is a great disadvantage to an overall development for the country. Laos is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia. The country is mountainous and as much as sixty percent of Laos' total land surface is covered by thick forests. She has two climatic zones. A hot summer and a cool winter are characteristic for upper Laos. In this part of the country, winter temperatures below freezing are not exceptional. No house is equipped with a heating system, and many inhabitants have no shoes. On the other hand, middle and lower Laos are situated in the tropical and subtropical zone with exuberant evergreen vegetation. In general, the physical geography and the geology does not reveal any substantial difference between Laos and the remaining Indochinese countries.

2. In the traditional kingdom of Laos, the State is the nominal owner of land. According to Laotian Law, he who cultivates land is its utilizer, not its owner. But in reality, in the hill territories, land is generally regarded as belonging to the rural community, while in the lowlands each peasant is actually the owner of the land he is cultivating.

Unfortunately, however, the burden of ancient tradition hinders the Laotian peasants from realizing the advantages of modern agricultural science and techniques. Most of the Laotian peasants are still unable to understand that higher crop yield may be obtained without changing the rice field, the water and the buffalo. Many are still convinced that the crops depend on the proper observance of rituals in honor of various *phi*, the powerful spirits.

Ninety percent of the Laotian population are farmers. Rice is everything. For centuries, the rice farming has been closely related to a definite season dependent on rain. In the *ray* system, the chief preparation of soil to be tilled consists in burning down the forest prior to the rainy season which starts in June. Sowing is done right at the beginning of the wet period.

No agrotechnical operation is undertaken until harvest time. The system is widely known as the *slash-and-burn* farming system and is applied in many varying forms according to the local traditions or individual ingenuity of the peasants. As a rule the same field is not used for very long. The Hmong farmers particularly will move on to a new area often. The worked-out land is abandoned and the *ray* farmers then settle in other areas and start the burning process anew.

It is not necessary to be reminded that the slash-and-burn system is devastating the forests. In general, the productivity of Laotian farmers is very low, probably the lowest in Southeast Asia. The low average productivity of labor of the individual peasant is due to the primitive character of work implements at his disposal. The almost lack of haste while working is another factor. A Polish author depicting peasant economy in India once wrote: *Three shepherds will look after one sheep and the peasant following the wooden plough will stop every now and then to count the larks in the sky.*

Perhaps matters are not that bad in Laos. Yet, the Laotian peasant living under the conditions of family economy does not need to work faster than is absolutely necessary to satisfy the family's demand. Thus, his farming activities may depend on his pleasure or mood. The water buffalo, the main draught force in Laotian farming, is notorious for its predilection for prolonged slumber in cool mud as well as its slow pace; however, the Lao peasant's working pace, I am afraid, often seems still slower. The lack of irrigation and the slow working pace are not only factors affecting the insignificant level of productivity of labor. The *impossibility of finding employment outside agriculture* is probably the most important factor of all. The industry? Industry is almost nonexistent.

3. The Lao are people of plains and valleys. They are scattered over the territory and dwell in small villages, always along a river. Thus, the groups of settlements are not so far removed from one another as in the hills with the Hmong or Iu-Mien people. The distance between the individual Lao villages is relatively much shorter. Yet their economy, too, cannot be said to depend to any great extent on the existence of a market. Barter or commercial exchanges seldom go beyond the limits of a purely local concern. One of the reasons for this is the fact that each farm generally cultivates the same plants and the amount of production is limited solely to the needs of the family. The plants most commonly cultivated in the lowlands, plains and valleys are: rice, corn, sweet potatoes, manioc, lemons, oranges,

bananas, papaya, sugar cane, tobacco, cotton, coffee, tea, cucumbers, and ground nuts.

4. Most of the existing history textbooks will tell you that the Laotian kingdom formation started in 1353 with the ascendancy of King Fa-Ngum. It is unfair. How could it be? Fa-Ngum himself had thirty-five rulers preceding him. The very first king, defeated by Fa-Ngum before his accession in 1353, was the latter's own grandfather: Souvanna Khamphong. Anyway this is not the place nor the time to argue about it. What we should know about the political history of Laos could be said in just one sentence. It is the story of a buffer zone and how its rivaling administrators are incompetent most of the time.

The continuing political conflict on Laotian soil is nothing new to the Laotians themselves. No matter how incompetent the Laotian rulers might have been, reasons for this permanent hostility situation in Laos are not to be found in Laos and among Laotians alone. The real conflict has to be viewed as the many centuries old conflict between the Imperial Vietnam and the Siamese Kingdom (Thailand). In the ancient days, Vietnam was much more influenced by the Chinese culture, while the Siamese and other people on the Mekong Valley were very much Indianized. At a later date important mineral resources, such as gold and silver, were found in the Mekong Valley. Subsequently, the region was very attractive to France. Laos, on the other hand, has always been a sparsely populated country. The interests of colonial France coincided totally with the ambition of the Vietnamese imperial rulers. The French were superior in military technology, therefore, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos consequently became French colonies under the same name: *French Indochina*. Not until the outcome of the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 did the three countries become independent.

Unlike Vietnam and Cambodia, Laos did not inherit any substantial "colonial heritage" after the occupiers were driven away. After almost sixty years of the French presence in Laos, almost all that was left were 1,500 miles of slightly improved roads, one high school, one military and one civilian hospital, some medical first-aid stations, some administration building, and military barracks. Out of the existing roads only one is of economic importance to the Laotians. This is the North-South Axis Road Number 13. The remaining ones are strategic roads built with the view to meet French colonial military interests (today, they serve the expansionist policy of the North Vietnamese Communists very efficiently).

Anyway after the French departure from Indochina, three mutually hostile political groups in Laos led by three rival Lao princes, contended for ascendancy. Two of the princes are half-brothers, the other one is their cousin. The Geneva Conference of 1954 committed Laos to neutrality. In spite of that the three princes were committed to serve, each one in the interest of his respective "big brother". Typically, one was pro-French, his half brother took the opposite stand and was pro-communist, and the last one was pro-American. The pro-American one was, unfortunately for U.S. foreign policy, one of the most corrupt and authoritarian Lao princes in the history of the kingdom. Suddenly, in 1960, a 27-year old captain seized power and attempted to bring Laos back to neutrality as defined by the 1954 Geneva Agreement. In those days, however, the U.S. State Department was still very much in line with the philosophy which was so famous for denouncing any political neutrality as immoral. Thus the young Laotian officer could not obtain critically needed backing from the U.S. government. In spite of his true patriotism, due mainly to his obvious lack of political experiences, he became a political tool in the hands of the North Vietnamese Communists. In 1964, after the fall of the captain, one Laotian general after another attempted to get control of the country, and not so much for the country itself. Finally, their own boss who was the prime minister of Laos during all this time changed his mind once again. This time, the pro-French prince, previously mentioned, decided to invest his premiership with the Laotian Communists. A self-destructive agreement with the Communists was first signed and joyfully celebrated in 1973 after another famous U.S. Secretary of State had surrendered himself peacefully that same year in the historical negotiation talks in Paris. Two years later, in 1975, while Laotians were celebrating their traditional Lao New Year, Cambodia and then South Vietnam fell into Communist hands. A few weeks later, the Laotian exodus started.

A final word on this extremely sad period of the modern history of Laos. It is truly difficult to survive with honor and dignity in a buffer state such as the kingdom of Laos. But we, the Laotians, especially our leaders, did not fulfill our obligations in difficult times. Our allies, on the other hand, should not have put that much responsibility on Laotian leaders who belonged to the "pre-independence generation" and had contradictory family clan interests which, generally speaking, did not coincide with the interests of the other strata of the Laotian society.

Regretfully enough, the younger Laotian generation did not do better. They had very little knowledge of their own cultural and historical background. The Western education, notably the

French, had taught us nothing about patriotism and the supreme value of many indigenous traditions. Instead, the young Laotian students were busy learning about the new materialistic culture which stressed making as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time. Therefore, their self-interests always came first, and their unfitness to govern the country was notorious. Fortunately, not all were good students of this new culture.

Chapter II

THE LAO AND THEIR UNIVERSE

If you should come to Laos in April you would probably find the weather too hot to walk in under the burning sun. With its average maximum of 93°F and the average minimum of 72.5°F, April, the fifth month of the Theravada Buddhist calendar, is the hottest month of the year. But April is one of the best seasons to visit the country because you would have a chance to see the elaborate ceremonies to release birds and animals, and to learn how the Lao people celebrate the departure of the old year.

If you should wait until June you would risk the heavy rains which won't stop until the second half of October. You would find mud everywhere. Also, many of the few existing roads throughout the country are closed to communication. In fact, beginning in June the strong winds blow westward bringing thus the "sky waters" from the clouds of the South China Sea and pouring them on Laos between eleven and twelve inches per month. We Lao love the rain. The "sky waters" motivate our sticky rice to flourish in the fields and make our fruits grow without any contractual arrangement. You would also witness a multitude of ceremonies by our Lao peasants to induce the spiritual forces, the unseen supernatural beings to save them from disasters such as drought or too heavy storms which would kill their crops. Most of all, the rainy season in Laos is an excellent time to educate our children in the countryside where the absence of schools has been a rule rather than an exception. The Lao family life develops intensively during this period of time, and you would be surprised to observe how the monsoon rain has enriched the Lao literature and many other aspects of the Lao culture.

Whenever you choose to visit Laos you will never miss our Lao public expression of faith. Whether it rains or not, early in the morning, seven days a week, you will see the Lao people, in all towns, kneeling faithfully by the side of the road. Each family kneels before its own home, waiting for the Buddhist monks to pass by and collect their daily donated food. In villages, the Lao will bring the food to the pagoda itself. The Buddhist monks are not productive in the economic sense of the word. However, their philosophy of life and their non-descriptive norms of behavior have a critical impact on the Lao ways of life. This impact is so critical that nearly every large village or any sizable group of villages has its own pagoda. However popular, Buddhism is not the unique guiding motivation behind the Lao life. There are many others, and it is only when they are combined that they constitute the pillars of the Lao universe. It is very interesting to see how the Lao mix rationality, magic, and religion. There are legends and tales reflecting this kind of melange of faiths. Here is one of the most beautiful and enlightening tales:

> *"Once in the immemorial time, there were two little birds, husband and wife, living in a rich, evergreen forest. They loved each other with an evergrowing passion and would rather stay all the time, days and nights, in their cozy nest. They talked lovingly and made a solemn promise to each other that they would never part. For a long time, life was wonderful for the two love birds. They spent their nights mostly wondering if other creatures, too, were as happy under the shining stars. They would leave their nest only when they were really hungry. As their love continued, so passed the time, and finally small eggs were also found in their lovely nest. The bird wife seemed to be hungry more often than ever, but could no longer accompany her beloved husband in searching for food. Therefore, she had to stay in the nest waiting and waiting. Every time he left, the husband's return seemed to be lasting longer than the previous one. Many concerns and anxieties came across her mind. From time to time the two birds kept renewing their solemn promise that no circumstances could make their separation possible.*
>
> *But one day, a sudden tragedy took place in that forest. The forest caught fire. The bird husband was away searching for food, and the bird wife would not leave the nest behind with all those eggs, the results of their love which contained the life of their future children. The bird husband, after sensing the smoke, flew back to the nest immediately. The two birds became engulfed in the forest fire. The husband could not persuade the wife to escape. She preferred to die in the nest of their love, together with her eggs. The angry flames started to leap around them. So terrible were the flames that the bird husband decided to fly very high and escape alone without waiting for his wife. The poor bird wife watched the husband escaping. Just a few moments before she was burned to death, she kept thinking of the solemn promise they made more than once not to depart from each other. Still the husband escaped to save his own life. So she committed to herself for the last time, as a bird, that in her next life she would*

never speak to a man. Her words were heard.

Sometime after that event, she was reborn, not as a bird but as a girl. Surprisingly enough, the bird husband, upon his death, was also reborn as a boy. The boy grew up naturally and developed himself to become, subsequently, a nice, good man with an extreme knowledge of charms and amulets. The girl generated many concerns to her parents who lived in a distant region and knew nothing about her former husband. She refused to associate herself with boys of her age and never talked to any man. Years went by and the girl became a woman, but still she did not address a single word to any man. Her parents were very worried for they knew that she would not find happiness in life. The young woman became ill when she reached the age of twenty, and she died thereafter. The news of her death was immediately known to the people living in the region, and from them the same news travelled to her former husband. The man came to see the family still mourning over the loss of their loved one. He said to the parents:

"Oh! My old people, don't cry! I have the right amulet which upon the correct usage will return the life to your daughter." He then took out a square amulet which he wore around his neck and murmured a few sacred words to the amulet and waved it over the dead body three times, from the heart to the head. Suddenly the girl came back to life, and to the surprise of many, she started to talk to all the men, young and old, who were there to mourn her own death. The amulet man was totally captivated by the girl's charming eloquence, and at the same time the revived young woman indicated an increasing interest in talking to the man. The two young people, therefore, did not need much time to fall in love with one another.

A few days later, a joyful ceremony was held in the village and the two lovers were pronounced husband and wife. They lived happily for the rest of their life. Sometimes the wife had a feeling that she had known her man before but could not remember exactly where or when. At other times the husband got the impression that they had been husband and wife before but could not understand how. Their feelings about the same past were so strong that they thought they had met each other in the previous life. Yet in spite of their impressions, they never knew for sure whether or not they had met each other before."

In almost all Lao legends and tales you will encounter *karma*, the Hindu theory on the transmigration of souls. At the same time, typically, magic and miracles will also be greatly emphasized because magic, as well as astrology,plays a very important role in the daily life of the Lao. However, there is always a place for human rationality in the legends of the Lao. The ending narrative of the story about the two birds was very conclusive in that aspect.

Now let us take a look at the Lao universe itself. The traditional Lao worlds are not heavenly bodies, not even the cosmos or the earth. The Lao worlds are invisible most of the time. They are closely associated with one another. Many of their inhabitants are said to be sharing the same space with humans. Among the most important are: the world of Naga where the King Dragon rules over all the waters and everything living within the rivers and oceans; the World of Garuda where the King Bird is responsible for every flying identity throughout the space (Garuda is believed to be the son of winds and can fly with the speed of light); the World of *Phi* where spirits, ghosts, demons and other supernatural beings live; and the World of Deva where angels and other divinities live. Humans and animals live on earth but belong to different worlds. People are the inhabitants of the World of Humans. Animals belong to the World of Animals, etcetera.

You can imagine the complexity of life for humans living in such a universe! One must know the rules for a peaceful coexistence among the inhabitants of all the worlds. Therefore, it is very important not to offend any of the supernatural powers, especially the *Phi*, if humans wish to have a long life on earth. Thus, spirit worship became very popular in Laos. This is the belief which maintains that spiritual and supernatural powers are present throughout the material and nonmaterial universe. Not only do those powers exist but also they can and will change the destinies of human beings if the *Phi* are not satisfied. The cult of Phi is so deeply ingrained in the Lao people that even now, in the United States, many Lao refugees are still keeping a small altar in their apartments or houses where occasional offerings can be made. Most Lao are convinced that the favor of the *Phi* is absolutely necessary for them to succeed in business or in any other enterprise.

Besides the Cult of *Phi*, Brahmanism is another philosophy which has a considerable influence on the life of Lao. Brahmanism or Hinduism holds that Brahma is a supreme being. He exists in several forms and may live different lives at the same time. The Lao are afraid and respectful of his powers. He is simultaneously the Creator (Brahma), the Preserver (Vishnu), and the Destroyer (Siva). He has a different wife for each different form he manifests. For instance Kali, the wife of Siva is a cruel woman who has an incessant demand for human sacrifices. On the other hand, Sarasvati, the wife of Vishnu is the promoter of music and arts. Hinduism introduced *karma* to the Lao. *Karma* implies that human beings are living a temporary life. Life itself is nothing but a fatalistic interlude between other lives. Our next life will, therefore, be critically dependent on our behavior in the present. It is also through Brahmanism that the Lao have learned about the existence of the thirty-two souls who reside in the human body. The *Baci* ceremony, which is specifically related to this belief, is still being celebrated from time to time in all Lao families. You will find the ceremony beautiful and socially educational. There will be more about *Baci* in Chapter Six.

Another great philosophy which frames overall Lao life is Buddhism. Buddhism was founded by Gautama and by him alone. The Lao consider this one man to be the greatest teacher of all time. Buddhism is a mode of conduct which relies not upon revelation or any divine inspiration but rather upon logic. In short, this is how Buddhism came into being. Gautama was a Nepalese prince who lived some time around 500 B.C. At the age of thirty, Prince Gautama decided to abandon everything he had and went away from home to inspect his own soul. This was at the time when India was dominated by an extreme rigid form of Brahmanic Caste system. Gautama was an educated man. He sensed that there was not any hope for individual spiritual and social improvement to progress within such an extremely fatalistic caste system. Gautama was married but his wife, his crown, and his wealth were all left behind. He went everywhere that a man could manage to walk on his feet. It was during those trips deep into the Indian countryside that Prince Gautama became aware of the extreme poverty and devastating disease. He then set a goal of finding a way to escape the pain and sorrow of life. He asked himself if his own soul could be made pure and how he could render services to the miserable mankind. He tried to obtain divine revelation or inspiration by going through an incredible period of extreme asceticism but the effort was fruitless. He then gave it up and tried something else. Many other efforts of Gautama were fruitless. Finally, years and years later, Gautama found enlightenment under a Bo tree during a session of his meditation. Thus, Gautama became Gautama Buddha. The word *Buddha* means simply the *Enlightened One*.

Interestingly, Buddhism, in its original concept, acknowledges no god as a supreme being. It did not preach the existence of a soul and promised no heaven or even life after death. Gautama Buddha offered simply a way to escape from the cycle of birth and death. What Buddhism taught in the ancient time was that (1) Suffering exists, (2) Craving for existence is the cause of suffering, (3) Craving for wealth, sensual excitement, and immorality can be overcome, and (4) the complete peace of mind and soul– *nirvana*– can be achieved through the Eightfold Path.

These teachings were known as the Four Noble Truths. The steps of the Eightfold Path needed to attain *nirvana* are: (1) the right views, (2) the right intentions, (3) the right speech, (4) the right action, (5) the right vocation, (6) the right effort, (7) the right thinking, and (8) the right concentration.

A few centuries after the death of Gautama Buddha, Buddhism was split into two main streams: The Mahayana doctrines and Theravada Buddhism. The Lao are followers of the latter. Many aspects of other philosophical schools were incorporated into the Mahayana doctrines, including the deification of Buddha himself. But the Theravada Buddhists maintain that the ideal Buddhist is a faithful devotee to the traditional Eightfold Path, so, they continue to revere the personality of Gautama Buddha and his original teachings.

As you can see, both Hinduism and Buddhism have contributed a great deal the making up of the Lao culture. But a Lao is a Lao and he will always reject the elements of any philosophy if they don't satisfy his pragmatic nature. Thus, the Lao have never accepted the caste system which is the inner citadel of Brahmanism. A Lao believes that he or she was born into a family, into a village, but not into a fatalistic caste. A Lao may live as long as he wishes to with his family but can leave his family and his village whenever the necessity arises. Even with Buddhism, although the concept of *nirvana* is accepted, the Lao will do his utmost to maximize his earthly pleasure out of his present life just relying upon the human rationality as a possible source of the immediate improvement of the present existence. However, at the same time, the Lao are oppressed by the *Phi*. Thus, sometimes the main object of their religious life is to devise adequate ways by which the *Phi* can be scared away or brought under control.

Chapter III

THE LAO CONCEPT OF A HUMAN BEING

What is a human being? A biologist will indicate that all life consists of living units called cells. Human beings are made of cells, millions and millions of cells. So are the plants and animals. The plants don't move about like animals because they have no organized movement within their cells.

According to the theory of evolution, human species are derived from primates. The primates have gone through many stages of life transformation, from the bush baby to man. Thus, changes to many parts of the body of the primates took place in this long process of evolution. Consequently, after many millions of years, the apes became the ape-men, and then the ape-men became human beings. The evolutionists have used cranial capacities to distinguish three sequential human species, namely: the handy man (*Homo Habilis*), the erect man (*Homo Erectus*), and the thinking man (*Homo Sapiens*).

When asked about the origin of man, a Christian is likely to give a totally different answer. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the believers have no doubt about the origin of mankind. A Christian, independent of nationality and church affiliation, is absolutely convinced that God created Heaven and Earth. All human beings descended from Adam and Eve who themselves are a creation of the omnipresent and mighty God. Thus, Adam and Eve became the progenitors of the human race. A Christian also knows that Adam was created out of God's divine love.

A traditional Lao is less fortunate than his Darwinist friends and his Judeo-Christian brothers and sisters. To a Lao, life will probably remain a great mystery forever although the birth of human life by itself may appear to him obvious enough. In fact, the origin of the world has never been a central question in the Lao mythology. Therefore, in traditional Lao tales there is nothing comparable to the well-known myths of creation around the world such as Japanese gods Izanagi and Izanami who created the island of Onokoro by stirring the Ocean, or the Egyptian god Atum who created the air and moisture and gave the soul, Ka, to Shu and Tefnut, or the Scandinavian giant Ymir, the first man who was born from the melting ice, etcetera.

The Lao legends differ from others as they do not presuppose that there was something uncreated in the beginning. Things are simply there and they are natural. To the Lao, it is obvious that events have causes although they cannot explain what the causes are. According to a legend, Laotians were found, not created. Please listen to the *Khoun Borom* legend:

> *"One day, on a white elephant, Khoun Borom, and his two wives were sent from Heaven to Muong Theng (Dien Bien Phu) to make a living. Upon his arrival, Khoun Borom found two enormous gourds which he subsequently pierced with a burned iron stick. Suddenly, men, women and domestic animals walked out of the pierced holes. Seeds and working tools were also found in the gourds. This was how the area was populated. As time went by, Khoun Borom's two wives gave him seven children, all sons. Khoun Lo, the eldest, was subsequently given the privilege of governing over the lands of Muong Swa where the later Kingdom of A Million Elephants originated from..."*

The Khoun Borom legend does not explain the complexity of human nature nor where those people found in the giant gourds came from. But that is very typical of the Lao who seldom philosophize about matters beyond their comprehensive power. Brahmanism, which had a great influence on the Lao society in the earlier time, connotes the non-recognition of any monotheism. All forms of belief including magic and the cult of spirits have, therefore, developed without any official control of any kind. Consequently, a jungle of disorderly superstitions, demons and ghosts have played an important role in the popular belief of the Lao. Even today, the traditional Lao still believe that they coexist with spirits of all kinds, and that some malignant demons may influence their lives or take them away. It is said that many of these bad spirits are the ghosts of those who have died of a tragic and unusual death. Such beliefs are particularly strong among the Lao who live in remote villages where they are exposed to wild beasts or sudden death caused by tropical diseases.

After Brahmanism came Buddhism. Through the Buddhist theory of reincarnation the Lao learn about the transmigration of souls. The theory suggests a sense of direction into the future: *Nirvana*. But it gives no explanation as to how or where the very first, human being came into existence.

Most of the Lao are religious people in a larger sense of the word. It is extremely difficult to draw the line between the believers of Animism, Brahmanism, Buddhism and the worship of a local deity. Therefore, in trying to formulate the concept of a human being, a traditional Lao will rely on as many elements as he can possibly find and comprehend. From the Buddhist reincarnation theory he will accept the explanation that his present life comes from the previous one and the conduct of his present human activities will affect his next life. The first conclusion then has to be that a human being is a reincarnation of oneself. From the Animistic and local deity, the Lao also learned that their life is invisibly associated with the coexistence of all kinds of spirits, generally called *Phi* (pronounced *pee*) in the Lao language. Moreover, some of the *Phi* are said to live within the human body. Thus, the Lao draw a second conclusion that a human being represents not only the highest level of animal species, but also may serve as a residential area to other supernatural beings. Finally, the Lao see themselves as quite capable of carrying out certain responsibilities by the decisions of their own. Therefore, they have also concluded that in spite of the *Phi*, human beings are quite independent and do not have to be always oppressed by the mercy of demons.

The complexity of the human being and the uncertainty about his origin must have fascinated Lao linguists since the beginning because they have chosen the term *Khon* to designate a human being. Interestingly enough, *Khon* means *to mix* in the Lao tongue. Thus, a human being is conceived as a kind of *mixture* or composite by nature. Perhaps this is why the giant gourds were necessary in the Khoun Borom legend.

Chapter IV

THE LAO PERCEPTION OF A HUMAN LIFE

There is a popular belief among the traditional Lao that a certain number of lives must evolve or be accomplished before anyone can reach the ultimate destination: *Nirvana*. It is also said that Prince Gautama himself had gone through five hundred different forms of life before he finally became a Buddha some two thousand five hundred years ago. Each life was of different length and differed from one another in nature, and those lives were not all associated with the human race.

The Buddhist teachings often use the previous lives of Buddha to illustrate the complexity of our human nature. The best known to date are the *ten lives*, carefully selected from the Buddha's previous incarnations. They are told in various ceremonies and festivities. They are called the *Jataka* tales. As a matter of fact, each tale of the Jataka is attempting to debate a major issue in human ethics. Generosity and its implication is the theme of *Vetsandon*, the last incarnation before Enlightenment was found when Prince Gautama became Buddha. This is what happened in the life of Vetsandon:

> *"Vetsandon became King of Pasexay, a city with walls of Sandalwood, when he was 16 years old. Being so young, he had not had time enough to learn many things from the late king, his father. He married a girl named Nang Mathee, and soon a son and daughter were born to them. They named the boy Kanha and the daughter Salee. Sometimes the family would go riding on the royal white elephant. All white elephants are sacred and bring good luck, of course, but this elephant, named Pachayanakhen, had been born on the same day as Vetsandon, and so was doubly lucky.*
>
> *Vetsandon enjoyed sharing his wealth with others, and the people liked him very much. Sometimes he would see very poor people and he would give away so much money that the royal treasury was almost empty. One of his advisers, named Lousaka, cautioned Vetsandon not to be so generous, but the young king would not listen. As long as there was money in the treasury, Vetsandon did not intend to have any poor or hungry people in his kingdom. All the people in Pasexay city had good houses to live in, plenty to eat, and were very happy. In a tributary city,*

Kalingka, people were not happy at all. They had little food and water, for the rains had failed their area one year. Every day was like the day before, a hot sun, and a sky either clear or with a few clouds that brought no rain. The governor of Kalingka called a meeting of the eight wise men. After much discussion it was decided that if they could get King Vetsandon's sacred white elephant, the rain would come. The governor then told them to go beg for the elephant from Vetsandon. In accordance with the request of the wise men from Kalingka, Vetsandon gave them the white elephant. The men from Kalingka went away rejoicing, leading Pachayanakhen. But the citizens of Pasexay City were very sad at seeing the departure of what was to them the symbol of their good fortune. When somewhat later, their king even gave away the royal carriage and horses, their sadness quickly turned to outrage. They expelled Vetsandon from the city. They felt he was too generous, and thus not qualified to be their king. Vetsandon, accompanied by Nang Mathee, Kanha and Salee, fled to the forest. There they met a hermit named Achoutta and a hunter named Chettabout who gave them food and helped them build a small palace in which to live. After awhile, they were just as happy in their little forest home as they had been in the great palace in the city. Seven months after the king had been expelled, the citizens of Pasexay City still had not decided on a new king. Lousaka tried to run things, but he did not like the job under the prevailing conditions. Many people in the city liked him even less than he liked the job. The dislike of him was because of his wife, Nang Amittata. Although Lousaka was old his wife was young. Nang Amittata was not only young, she was beautiful, and not only beautiful, but a very good person. All the men admired her. They cursed their wives because they were not the equal of Nang Amittata. The wives became angry at Nang Amittata and cursed her.

"Nang Amittata and Lousaka became so unhappy they knew something had to be done. They decided that Lousaka should go to the forest and beg Vetsandon to let his son and daughter come back to live with them in Pasexay. Maybe the children would bring them good luck. Lousaka went to the forest and wandered around the trails. After a while some fierce dogs ran him up a tree and he was almost shot by the dogs' owner, hunter Chettabout. After the hunter learned, however, that Lousaka *was a friend of Vetsandon's, he spared him, and the hermit, Achoutta, showed Lousaka the way to Vetsandon's forest home. When Lousaka arrived, Nang Mathee was gone, looking for fruits in the forest. She could not return for a long time because of tigers and other wild beasts that barred the way. Lousaka explained to Vetsandon how everyone in Pasexay was so miserable and asked for Kanha and Salee. Vetsandon agreed to give his children to Lousaka in order to help the people of his unhappy kingdom. When Nang Mathee managed to escape from the tigers and return home, Vetsandon explained that he had agreed to give their son and daughter to Lousaka. Nang Mathee fainted. When she regained consciousness, she begged her husband not to part with Kanha and Salee. When she recovered from the first shock, however, she realized her husband had given away their children because of his great soul. She respected him and was glad.*

Lord Indra was looking down on all of this from his throne in the lofty thunderheads of the sky. He knew that if someone came to beg for Nang Mathee, Vetsandon would give her away, too. So Indra, or Prain as he is known in Laos, changed himself into an old man and went to see Vetsandon and asked for his wife, explaining that he had no one in the world to care for him. Vetsandon picked up Nang Mathee and gave her to the old man. Although the latter accepted Nang Mathee, he quickly changed himself back into Lord Indra and handed her back to her husband. He also restored the children to their parents. The god then told Vetsandon that he had no right to give away his wife, who loved only him, to anyone else, nor did he have the right to give away his children. Too much of a good thing, such as generosity, leads to grief, Lord Indra explained.

When Lousaka returned to Pasexay and told of his adventures in the forest with Vetsandon, the people remembered how happy they had been before they had expelled their king. They sent a delegation to the forest and invited Vetsandon to return with Nang Mathee and Kanha and Salee. Everyone in Pasexay was happy as long as Vetsandon ruled and there were no more poor or hungry people within the walls of Sandalwood."

The Vetsandon tale is very popular in Laos. So are all other legends dealing with the *Karma* theory of reincarnation. The Lao believe that there is life everywhere. The complexity of the Lao universe was described in Chapter Two. Of course, there is life in all humans, animals, and insects. Each one of them is in the same process of evolving towards *Nirvana*. Moreover, the Lao believe that trees, mountains, or rivers are equally expressions of life in their universe. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to understand the Lao philosophy of life in which our human lives represent virtually a very, very small part of the life itself. This is why the lack of motivation in a Lao's daily activities may seem, sometimes, apparent. The person involved will tend to be passive in his community. This is possible because he thinks that his present life is merely an interlude between other lives which may be more interesting or more important. Sometimes, therefore, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls has been accused of embodying an extreme form of fatalism, which impedes human ambition. It may also lead the local leadership into an impasse under various circumstances. Most of the time, however, the *Karma* theory has been serving the Lao as an efficient factor of moderation in their daily life.

In trying to help you to understand the different expressions of life in the Lao universe, I would like to invite you to listen to the tale about the Mekong River, one of the largest rivers in the world. Many Lao still believe that the Mekong is inhabited by many dragons, and that the river has a life of its own:

> *"Lao people always say that the Mekong originated from Nong Kasae (the Kuva Lake) and that the water from the Mekong and from the Nan River (possibly the Yangtze Kiang River or the Menam River in Thailand) cannot mix in the same bottle, for the bottle will crack or even burst. The story behind that goes like this: Once upon a time there lived two dragon kings in Nong Kasae. One was called Souttoranark and the other was Souvanranark. Each was very powerful and had many thousands of followers. They became very good friends. Every year they visited and helped one another in many ways, often exchanging gifts. One day, King Soutto and his men went into a forest to hunt. He was lucky to find big game, an elephant. In spite of its thin hair, the elephant is one of the largest animals. King Soutto gave a big share of the meat to his friend. When Souvanranark received the gift, he was delighted and sent back a message to thank his friend. One day in the third month, King Souvanranark and his soldiers went out to hunt along the lake. He was making a determined effort to find big game such as deer, rhinoc-*

eros, elephants or buffaloes, but they did not have any luck. He could not find anything. Finally he managed to get a porcupine. He and his people returned to the palace and began to skin and cut up the animal. Then the king divided the meat into equal parts. Souvan had his men take Soutto's share to him. Seeing that skin and the spines of the animal were beautiful, the King sent some of them along, too.

When King Soutto looked at the amount of meat in comparison with the spines, he thought that his friend was unfair. "How could he possibly do that to me?" he thought. "Only this much meat from the biggest animal in the world?" "I can't believe it," he said. He refused to accept the gift and told his friend's soldiers to return the gift. He also told them to ask their king to come to see him personally. But before leaving, King Souvan's soldiers pled, "Your Majesty, this is the meat of a porcupine. Although its spines are much larger than elephant hair, its body itself is much smaller than an elephant. That is why we could bring only this much meat." King Soutto was still very angry and would not listen. Upon their arrival at King Souvan's palace, the men went straight to report the incident. "Your Majesty," they said, "your gift that we delivered has been refused. King Soutto also told us to ask you to come to see him tomorrow." King Souvanranark, after hearing that, said, "What has become of my dear friend? I'm going to find out myself tomorrow." In any case, I don't think he is going to give up. I don't think he will listen to my explanation. And I don't think he knows what a porcupine is. He just looked at its spines and thought it was an animal bigger than an elephant. Why doesn't he see that what I gave was a sincere gift? Even though it was just a small amount, it was an equal share. I didn't take advantage of him. "Why did he return it to me with anger instead of thanks?"

At dawn the following morning, King Soutto assembled all his men in the meeting hall thinking his friend would come. When all his men reported to him, Soutto spoke to them with a firm voice, "We would be prepared because our friend Souvan has betrayed us. He did not follow our agreement. He will come to settle the problem with me by himself. All of you know that a porcupine is a larger animal than an elephant because its spines are so big and sharp. It must be the largest animal in the world." After his ministers heard that, they thought they should explain to the king which animal was larger, but they were afraid of being executed. Instead, they kept quiet and said, "We are ready to listen to your order, your Majesty." At that moment, Souvan and his people appeared. Even though King Soutto was still angry he gave his friend a warm welcome. But he thought he would not excuse Souvan if he did not admit that he was guilty. As soon as the meeting opened, Soutto began speaking, "Dear friend, Souvan, I thought we were really sincere friends and both would follow our agreement seriously. I don't see how you could betray me." Souvan denied his friend's accusation of being dishonest. He said that he loved and trusted his friend. He could swear for his faithfulness. These statements made Soutto even more furious and he said he could not listen. He invited comments from the audience. He asked, "Which of us is selfish or inconsiderate?" When I got an elephant, a smaller animal than a porcupine, I gave my friend an equal share while he gave me only a small amount of the porcupine meat. "That was not fair." When Soutto finished talking, his soldiers clapped and laughed at King Souvan. When the noise faded away, Souvan explained again, "Please listen again, my dear friend. I do not think you have ever seen a porcupine. You cannot judge the size of an animal by the size of its spines or hair. An elephant is a big animal but its hair is very thin. Even its eyes are small. The eyes of other animals, such as buffaloes, cows, and horses are larger than an elephant's, but their bodies are smaller. Of course, a porcupine's spine is larger then the hair of an elephant, but its body is not much larger then some kinds of birds. Please do not misunderstand. Do not break our friendship. Please think that I am always your good friend and I also think that you are always my best friend."

No matter what and how much Souvan tried to explain, Soutto insisted that what his friend said was not true. He rose from his chair and walked away. Souvan left without knowing what was going to happen next. A few days later, Soutto sent a message to Souvan saying that if Souvan was still stubborn he should prepare for an attack. After reading the message, Souvan realized that he had no choice. He immediately sounded the gong to assemble his men. When they gathered they discussed how ignorant and inconsiderate Soutto was. Seven days after the message reached Souvan, Soutto moved his force to Souvan's territory. All the dragons came with magic *power. They moved so fast that they churned the water until it was muddy. Suddenly, Souvan ordered his soldiers to confront them, causing a big turmoil. All the Kuva area became cloudy and hazy. The sun could not be seen for seven days. All the animals, big and small, were afraid. The birds flew away. The war went on and on, for the two sides were equally strong. The water became muddier. More and more living beings were dying, and chaos forced some of the gods living in the heavens to move away. The king of gods sympathized with the small animals, so he cast a spell with his supernatural power to threaten two friends. Finally, they stopped fighting.*

The god ordered them to build to rivers to compensate for their deeds. Soutto was responsible for making the Mekong from the lake to the sea, while Souvan was put in charge of building the Nan River. The god finally convinced Soutto of the size of a porcupine and make him understand Souvan.

Ever after they were good friends again. But the waters of the two rivers have not yet forgotten the hatred that led to their creation."

Note: The story related to the creation of the Mekong River was known to the Lao before Buddhism was introduced to them. Therefore, there was no reference to it in the tale. Both of the reproduced stories in this Chapter are excerpts from Legends of the Lao, a compilation by Xay Kaignavongsa and Hugh Fincher.

Chapter V

THE LAO LIFE CIRCLE

At the present time, most of the Lao people still regard their present life as an interlude. To them, this life is a life among many other possibilities of lives or rather between other forms of life. Being Theravada Buddhists, the Lao in general, rightly or wrongly, believe in the theory of reincarnation. In the Buddhist philosophy, believers of the transmigration of souls, perceive their human lifetime as an instrumentally critical passage towards their ultimate destination: Nirvana. Thus, the whole lifetime of an individual is being viewed most frequently as a "circle". The Lao further believe that there are many possible "circles" in the nature of our human life. According to the same theory, a single circle of life under human form may actually have a quantity of those "circles". For instance, the popular Lao belief has always maintained that a person may be born to become a prosperous merchant, a powerful leader, or a king in one lifetime, while in another lifetime the same individual reincarnated from the same soul could become a being who was not well known.

The concept of our human lifetime as an interlude, and the generally admitted perception of the present lifetime as an instrumental passage are extremely important in understanding the reasoning process behind the Lao philosophy of life circle. There are several ways to determine the life circle itself. One way is to view the circle in relation to the obvious question of life and death. In this case, there are four elements in such a circle: the birth, the aging process, sickness, and death. The birth or the act of rebirth is conditioned by the craving for existence, the craving for wealth, etcetera. Once a person is born, there is no way to stop the aging process, sickness, and death. Therefore, goes the theory, if the craving process could be somehow stopped, the birth or the act of rebirth won't be necessary any more (See Chapter Two).

Another way of looking at the life circle is to focus on the methodological aspects of the circle itself. Precisely, for our educational purposes, I would like to invite you to have a look at the Lao childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and parenthood. In a sense, the whole lifetime of a traditional Lao is dedicated to "education". Education is instrumentally critical in reaching maturity in a lifetime. Like in many other cultures, before reaching the developmental stage of the necessary maturity in life, the Lao have to go through several "gates" by following a series of sets of steps.

To understand the rationale of the Lao life circle and to be able to escape from the act of rebirth itself, the Lao believers of the transmigration of souls will tend to possibly improve all aspects of the present life. To improve means to master the matters of concern. Therefore, the whole lifetime can also be presented as an uninterrupted educational process. Let's start with the "child".

THE LAO CHILD

The reincarnation theory is very popular among the Lao people. To make sure that the Lao themselves understand and accept the present lifetime as an instrumental passage towards Nirvana, the reincarnation theory will maintain that a child actually is not a child. Moreover, the Lao child is not simply a "product" of the father and the mother. In this philosophy, the father and the mother are rather instrumental to act of rebirth. Their child should, therefore, be seen as a reincarnation of an independent soul. However, there is a strong interrelationship between the "child" and the persons who will become the "chosen" father and mother. The relationship itself is an accumulation of many lifetimes' interactions between the concerned parties. The implications of such a theory, when accepted, will always be far-reaching for its believers. Thus, the first significant event in the life of a Lao is the naming ceremony (See the next Chapter). Traditionally, the proper "childhood" of a Lao, will last up to the age of fourteen during which time the child will be given the privilege to observe. Observation is probably a key word in the Lao traditional system of education. Situations to be observed are not elaborated to serve the purpose of the child's educational needs per se. However, activities surrounding the child are closely related to the daily life of the community. The scope of the child's interest is limited to the child's own family affairs. Upon reaching the age of ten, the Lao child will have more occasions to observe the social forms of life between his own family and other members of the same community. This is the time to teach the child about the Lao kinship system.

THE LAO ADOLESCENT

The adolescent, in the traditional Lao understanding, includes people from 15 to 29 years of age. During the first 14 years, the Lao child learns about life mainly through observations. They might have been participating in many activities, but their participation was not critical to the rationality of the learning process. It is in the following fifteen years that the young Lao will be facing all kinds of occasions where his skills of observation will be "tested". The adolescent will now learn about life through active participation in working with all the members of his own community and outside his own community. This is the time to travel and to learn about the surrounding environment. The Lao adolescent begins to see and is able to compare different patterns of the social and economic situations in a relatively larger community than his own. Many will choose their mates and get married in this period of life, but marriage by itself does not imply, in the Lao tradition of thinking, that the couple is independent. Independence is associated with "adulthood" which is the next logical step in the mental and intellectual development of the Lao.

THE LAO ADULT

To be an "adult", in the Lao understanding, is to be totally independent, independent in terms of self-sufficiency and in terms of quality in self-reliance. Therefore, the adulthood of a Lao is closely identified with his world of work. The number of actions undertaken during the next twenty years or so will indicate the range of experiences of the "adult" person. The ways and circumstances under which those activities have been conducted or accomplished will tell about the ability or the nature of the adult person involved. Usually the Lao adults are found between 30 and 49 years of age. However many people in this age group may very well remain totally dependent and, therefore, may never become adults in their lifetimes.

THE LAO PARENT

A "wise" person is a mature person. Maturity, in this context, means as well balanced judgement on important issues of life with the capability of seeing implications involved in the decision making process. A wise person is sometimes called a *parent.* In the Lao culture, the term *parent* is not always a synonym for *father* or *mother*. In fact, in the term *parent* there is more than being a father or mother. Actually, only successful fathers and mothers can become parents. In this case, success means the smooth passage from childhood to adulthood as a result of a systematic involvement on the part of the father and mother for their children. In this sense, anybody can become a parent, provided that the person involved has successfully helped another person in becoming an "adult".

Chapter VI

IMPORTANT LAO CEREMONIES

Celebrations and ceremonies seem to never end in a typical Lao family. All of them, whether religious or not, are closely related to all phases of the Lao life circle described in Chapter Five. Buddhism offers a way of life to the Lao but prescribes them no rules as to how to celebrate important moments for a human being in their lifetime. Therefore, the Lao are mixing the various rites from Brahmanism with elements of the widely dominating popular belief in the cult of the spirits, the famous *phi*.

The *su-kwan* ceremony, or *baci* in a more formal language, is the core of every popular celebration. *Su* means *to invite* and *kwan* the *Soul*. This is how a *su-kwan* ceremony is held in its simple form. After a tower made from the banana leaves and decorated with hundreds of flowers has been prepared, it will be put on a mat just in the middle of the living room. Usually, the tower stands on a silver tray and is supported by a traditional bamboo table which is round and low. There is a candle on the top of the tower. Hundreds of white yarns symbolizing the traditional sacred thread are placed around the tower, between the flowers, and through the small bamboo sticks. The host and guests will be sitting on the floor forming a circle around the table. Between the table and the sitting people, there is food, mostly a chicken cooked with its head and feet, a few boiled eggs, candies and cakes, and a bottle of rice wine with a small glass.

When the time comes to start the ceremony, the host will ask the most senior member of the community to lead the celebration. After accepting the mission, the senior person will join his two hands and press them against his chest. His gesture is immediately followed by all the rest of the people surrounding the tower. He then will begin to chant a few magical formulas which may last from a few minutes to one whole hour depending on occasions. The man is actually inviting the mobile souls to return to their residences. According to the popular belief, there are thirty-two of such mobile souls presiding over the human body. Each soul has its own residence, thus, there are thirty-two residential organs. The King soul is believed to "live" in our head (this is the main reason why some Southeast Asians do not wish their head to be touched or even pointed at by another person). Anyway, after each spelled formula, a yarn will be taken off the bamboo stick and placed around the wrist of a chosen person. The yarn will end with a tied knot to symbolize an effective return of the absent soul. According to tradition, the person who receives such a yarn or yarns should keep them on for at least three consecutive days.

Su-kwan is so popular in Laos that there is a special *su-kwan* for almost each imaginable occasion. But mostly, a *su-kwan* or a *baci* is held for the following reasons: the birth of a child, the child's entry to the Buddhist priesthood, the wedding, the death of a person, a recovery from a serious sickness, the departure for a long trip, a return home from a long journey abroad, a welcoming gesture for honorable guests, a reunion with good friends, etcetera.

Su-kwan is also the most social event in Lao cultural life. In a country where people do not shake hands to say "Hello" and where boys and girls do not embrace each other in public, the *su-kwan* ceremony presents an excellent occasion to express feelings of concern, friendship, and respect. The person receiving the yarn is supposed to extend one hand towards the blessing wisher, while the other hand must be kept with straight fingers at the level of one's face. There are two positions for the extended hand. First it remains empty and must have the palm turning towards the ground. This is the time when the wisher commands the "bad elements" inside the body to get out, and then the palm is turned back to face the sky. This is the moment when friends and relatives will put food, fruits, and an egg in the hand while wishing the person all the best. Finally, it is the wishtaker's turn to become the wisher and the same patterns will be repeated over and over again.

Chapter VII

MAJOR LAO HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS

In Vientiane and some other larger Laotian towns, you will have the impression that the Lao are never on time. This is particularly obvious when there are many *boon* going around. The notorious casualness about time and appointments of the Lao towners are closely related to the *boon*, a common name for all imaginable occasions of feasting, gaiety and enjoyment. Most of the *boons* last all night with a diversity of entertainments. In Laos, all family ceremonies, seasonal festivities, welcoming parties for dignified personalities and close friends, and, of course, all the religious rites are *boons*. *Boon* simply means *merit* or *good deeds* in the Lao tongue, therefore, the Lao love to organize the *boon*. Most sincerely, the Lao will always regret that the twenty-four-hour day is too short and that all the days of the year are not enough to celebrate all the *boons*.

All the foreigners who have stayed long enough in the former Kingdom of Laos could easily have learned that the Lao are simple and practical people. Most of the Lao have only two foremost concerns on earth: how to comply with the necessity of acquiring some kind of religious merit and how to enjoy the pleasures of life in the immediate present. The Lao even know how to compromise with Gautama Buddha. For instance, in the Four Noble Truths, Buddha taught his followers about the cause of human suffering. Buddhist teachings recommend that one should avoid sensual excitements if Nirvana is to be achieved. The Lao have their own interpretation of Buddhism in this regard and they seem to be totally comfortable with the extraordinary joyful celebration of the endless *boons*. From the Lao point of view, this combination of pleasure in life and religious merit-making seem to be eminently logical. In fact, the Lao consider the pleasure in life not as a handicap but rather as an evidence of success in the process to eradicate suffering. The Lao believe in the transmigration of souls. They are also convinced that their present life is just another interlude. However, the idea to kill suffering by having pleasure is typically Lao. It is so dominant in the Lao Buddhist minds that even in their frequent prayers they hope their next life will be a more enjoyable one. *Muan* is *having pleasure* in Lao and *muan* is a key word in understanding the Lao mentality. *Muan* is highly visible in all celebration of all *boons*. In Laos, religion and enjoyment are mixed and always come as a pair.

The basic elements for setting the celebration time of all the boons are the Lao calendar and astrology. The Western calendar is little understood by the Lao who live outside the capital and provincial cities. The ordinary Lao year has twelve months of thirty and twenty-nine days alternately. Each month is divided into periods of the waxing and waning moon. Of course all periods are good for the *boon* celebrations, provided good reasons are given. Reasons for a good *boon* are plentiful in the Lao universe!

Here are some major holidays and festivals, nationally celebrated in Laos:

Boon Pee Mai (The New Year Celebration)

In a regular year, the Lao months are numbered from one to twelve. The first month begins somewhere between November and December of the Western calendar. However, the Lao will not celebrate their New Year until a later date, in April, for astrological reasons. Astrology plays a monumental role in the Lao culture. The astrological signs of the fifth lunar month (April) seem to point to light and prosperity. The exact time for the Lao New Year celebration varies from year to year, though it must be held between the sixth day of the waning moon of the fifth month and the sixth day of the waxing moon of the sixth month. Therefore, the Lao New Year is being celebrated always in mid-April.

The *Boon Pee Mai* or the *Boon of the Fifth Month*, as the Lao prefer to call it, is a great feasting time, lasting from three to seven days. The last day of the old year is when the Lao houses are systematically swept to put things in order but also to symbolize the expulsion of the bad and marauding *phi* (spirits) hiding in the same residence. On the first day of the New Year, the entire Lao population will go to the pagoda in the morning, bringing with them perfumed holy water to cleanse the many existing statues of Gautama Buddha. In their prayers, the Lao will ask for good health and a better welfare for their families in the incoming year. The first day is also the time to pay visits to family members who do not live in the same house, to friends, and to all the respected figures in the region. The next day is a day of enjoyment. Boys and girls and people of all ages, by hundreds and by thousands, will go down the streets pouring water on each other, singing, and dancing all day long. In the royal city of Luangprabang, special celebrations are held to release birds and other animals throughout New Year's day. To conclude the festivity of *Boon Pee Mai* the Lao will build many small stupas along the river banks and then in the courts of the pagodas. Once again they will pray for a good year and for a long life with as many enjoyable moments as the number of grains of sand which were used to erect the stupa itself.

Boon Bang Fai (The Rocket festival)

This is the *boon* of the sixth lunar month, a very important *boon* to the Lao farmers who depend on the rain for watering their ricefields. There are dances, processions and puppet shows in the streets, but the main focus is on the firing of bamboo rockets. The Lao took this tradition from Brahmanism which started the ritual firing of rockets to provoke the rain. Today, every Lao knows that the heavy rain will come after the month of May, whether the rockets were fired or not. Nevertheless, *Boon Bang Fai* will go on because it gives an occasion for enjoyment to the farmers who need some kind of relaxation before the long months of hard work during the incoming rainy season. The Rocket Festival is probably the most jubilant celebration of all Lao festivities.

The sixth lunar month, at the full moon of May, is also a time for the Lao to commemorate the birth, enlightenment, and death of Gautama Buddha, although it has nothing to do with the previously mentioned rocket festival.

Boon Xuang Hua (The Boat Racing Festival)

This *boon* occurs at the end of the rainy season between October and November. It marks the return of farmers to their social life. The street are full again of singers and dancers. The tradition of boat racing is connected with the legend about a dishonest king who had tried to take a beautiful woman from her husband through many tricky and unfair competitions. The last game between the king and the desperate man was the boat racing. Fortunately, many dragons came to assist the poor husband in the critical moment. The dragon king, *Naga*, disguised himself as a boat for the oppressed husband. Consequently, the king's boat sank and the king with many of his rowers were drowned. Thus, the story of boat racing is a story of the victory of the simple and humble people over their oppressive masters.

In the early days, it was the tradition to have the race between the king's boat and the people's boat. If the king's boat won in any year, the Lao would immediately think that the people would have problems and hardship in the coming year. But if the people's boat should win, the traditional Lao would believe that the people would have a peaceful year with good health and prosperity for all. Nowadays, there are more than two boats in the race and the result of the boat racing does not affect the people's destiny anymore.

Boon That Luang (The *That Luang* Festival).

In 1566, a great stupa was erected in the administrative capital city of Vientiane. It was built to cover another smaller stupa erected earlier in the 14th century. It is believed that the Great Stupa in Vientiane contains a relic of Gautama Buddha. *Boon That Luang* occurs every year at the full moon of the twelfth lunar month. It coincides with the end of harvest time. The main attraction of the festival is the international fair where the outside world makes many impressions on the Lao. All Laotian provinces are represented. The magnitude of Laotian ethnicity is always highly visible in such an occasion. The *That Luang* festival is also an opportunity to see the King and the Queen of Laos walking only a few meters away. Since the fall of the country in 1975, this no longer happens although the Great Stupa still stands.

Chapter VIII

THE LAO FAMILY STRUCTURE

To the best of my knowledge, a systematic study of the Lao family has not been launched yet. Until the present day, interest in the Lao family had been expressed only by means of moralistic proverbs, folklore, and a few articles of law. Undoubtedly, the Lao family-kin units, like many others, are facing both directions, toward the society and toward the individual. Unfortunately, not much is known about the societal frameworks of a Lao family, and even much less is known about the individuals in the Lao family itself. Nevertheless, we shall try to reflect some of the personal and societal values which may have contributed to the formation of a particular form of the Lao family.

In the Lao society, girls and boys play together, grow together, and work together. They will meet each other in the ricefields during the rainy season, in the forest while collecting the mushrooms and the firewood, or in the river while fishing and bathing. Of course, they will meet one another at the village pagoda and at all the boons (festivities) in their village and anywhere not too faraway. The young Lao are allowed considerable freedom to talk about love between members of the opposite sex, although in public, a young Lao male and female will not touch one another or openly suggest there are any intimate links between the two of them. The opportunity for courtship is considerable in the Lao society. Premarital sexual relationships, while not encouraged, are tolerated when they happen occasionally and especially when the young people are discreet about it themselves. The flexibility in the attitude of the Lao parents on this matter is closely related to the strong popular belief that karma exists and that the young people involved may have been lovers before in their previous life. In general, young people in the Lao country are relatively free to choose their own mates. Consequently, a young male and a young female will decide to get married by themselves. The Lao marriage arrangement exists. It is complicated and time consuming. However, the arrangement is purely ceremonial and absolutely secondary to the decision made by the young people of their own will.

After the marriage, the female may keep her maiden name or take her husband's. The young couple will not move into a separate dwelling right away. According to the traditional Lao custom, the future residence of the young couple is a part of the final marriage arrangement. As a rule, the groom will have spend two to three years in the bride's parental household where the young married man will assume the hard work of the ricefield and share his father-in-law's many other responsibilities. If the bride is the youngest daughter of the family, the groom may never leave the property of his parents-in-law because the youngest daughter, or son, will normally remain in the parental household and will inherit the house site upon the death of the parents.

This type of temporary resettlement at the bride's parental household serves many social and educational purposes for the future heads of the Lao families. The groom will learn the art of living in harmony with people not belonging to his own family of orientation. He will also learn to appreciate the quality of life and hardship of other people. At the same time, this two to three year period of togetherness is long enough for the bride's parents to crystallize their own opinions about their son-in-law. Therefore, in the time of necessity, the parental advice to their own daughter will be invaluable as to how the young married woman, once away from home, can help to improve her own relationship with her parents-in-law. This period is also the time for the young couple to expect the coming of their own offspring. In this way, most of the first Lao children were born in their maternal grandparents' households. This custom is extremely helpful to the young mother because she can feel absolutely "at home", thus avoiding all kinds of psychological and emotional embarrassments. This is also an excellent time for the groom to learn how to express his true love for his wife through the due respect shown towards her parents. This is when the Lao grooms come to respect their parents-in-law and this "learned" respect will be tremendously helpful in cementing in kinship between the two families-in-law. It is also in this period that a married Lao starts to develop the idea of himself or herself as belonging to three different nuclear families. First of all he belongs to his own family of orientation in which he was born and reared, including his parents, brothers and sisters. Secondly, thanks to the bride's parents' attitude, the young married Lao man will feel a sense of belonging to the parents-in-law's family. Thirdly, he belongs to his own family of procreation that he now establishes by marriage which includes his wife and children. This beautiful tradition is also helpful to the Lao families in an economic sense because it is extremely necessary to those parents who have only daughters. If all daughters should accompany their spouse immediately after the marriage, it could create a sudden labor deficiency on the farm which might be critical to the existence of the bride's family of orientation itself.

The Lao society has been a feudal society for centuries. The Lao aristocracy was once dominated by the polygamy principle. Wives were then considered as economic and status assets. In the modern time, polygamy had not been encouraged among the Lao, but neither was it forbidden by the Lao law. Therefore, in principle, it has been possible for a Lao man to take a second wife or as many as he could afford. In terms of the household, however, a second wife and all consecutive ones are always subordinate to the first wife because there is no legal status for the second wife and the rest. Within the Lao law, no distinction is made between children from the different wives. Anyway, most of the Lao have come to understand that additional wives may only cause additional problems and no longer validate their superior status in the present society. Some Lao may not agree with this logic, but are simply too poor to afford more than one wife.

The Lao family is a patrilineally extended family. The composition of the Lao household is variable. The descent is traced through the male line. All children will carry the family name after their father's but the Lao patrilineal descent does not mean that a Lao is related only to his or her father's male kin. The kinship is very much alive in the Lao mind. Upon reaching adulthood and marrying, the Lao do not terminate their close relationship with their families of orientation. Moreover, the sisters and brothers who have married and left home are still considered members of the family of orientation. Therefore, it happens quite naturally in some regions of Laos that a whole village or even a group of villages is composed almost entirely of kin, derived from both the maternal and paternal parenthood.

The Lao family also plays a very important role in the socialization process of the young Lao. Most naturally, individuals who live in such extended family units have to learn the art of compromise. The guiding thought in the Lao family is to be consistent with the kin's demands and expectations. It is imperative, therefore, to learn what to do and what not to do within the family units. The learning process has to be very slow because the Lao adults tend to avoid giving any overt guidance. Somehow the Lao children are expected to gain wisdom by just being associated with life on earth and through their skills of observation. The Lao kinship system functions on affective ties and a certain amount of obligation. The network consists of people having various personalities and behaving in various ways. A personal achievement is very important to the family in terms of pride and honor. The concern for keeping the kinship intact is considerable in the Lao families which remain the Lao society's prime economic and socializing units. Among the kin-based Lao, there are terms that distinguish between seven generations. However, the Lao society is far from being dominated by family and kinship organization.

After having experienced life with the bride's parents, most of the Lao couples will go and live near the groom's parents. In the new household, labor is divided along the lines of sex and age. Most of the heavy work will go to the male members, but all the domestic tasks would be assumed by women who have considerable say in all matters.

Chapter IX

THE LAO AND THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS

The economy of the kingdom of Laos is based on primitive agriculture with natural economy prevailing. Laos is undoubtedly the most backward country in Southeast Asia in regards to economic development. Laotian agriculture belongs to the less developed systems of rural husbandry. Whereas the Laotian peasant harvests but one crop a year, the Thais and the Burmese, as well as the population of Vietnam, have for a long time, gathered two or even three crops of paddy in a year.

A great majority of Lao have occupations consisting of rural activities. Seventy-five percent of the active Lao population, ranging from fifteen to fifty five years of age, are farmers. However, the rural economy which plays such an important role in determining. the living conditions of the Lao has continuously been neglected and is among the least known branches of economy to which little research effort has been dedicated. Neither the Laotian government nor any other important public or private body has ever worried about the development of agriculture. The lack of dispensable funds, insufficient state administration, the complex social system alongside the absence of any appropriate plan for the general development of the economy as a whole, are further causes of such conditions and explain why the barter or commercial exchanges seldom go beyond the limits of a purely local concern.

An analysis of one example of the Lao family budget should give you a fair idea of the situation which most of the Lao exist. The data quoted below were obtained as a result of an inquiry conducted under very difficult conditions. They are not totally representative but seem to offer some useful information for the understanding of Lao peasant holdings.

Our typical Lao family consists of seven members: father, mother, four children, and one relative. The family lives in a rectangular house raised off the ground on piles. The village, typically, is located just above flood level on one of many rivers or tributaries.

1. *Rice*: The average surface of the Lao family ricefields equals 6 acres; the average yield from 1 acre amounts to 759 pounds of paddy, i.e. 759 X 6.0 = 4,554 pounds of paddy or 2,728 pounds of rice. Roughly speaking, the yield is 220 pounds of rice per month. The price (1965: 1 U.S. dollar = 500 kips) is 6 cents

per pound of rice, i.e. 2,200 X 0.06 = $158.40. The above production is sufficient to cover the family's own needs and quite adequate at that.

2. *Other farm plants:* A Lao family also has a garden where cucumbers, bananas, corn, papaya, sugar cane, tobacco, ground nuts, and manioc are planted. This type of garden is called *swan.* The average *swan* has an average surface equal to 1,900 square yards. Cucumbers take three months from seed to harvest and can bring $30. Three other crops may bring to the family another income $42. The entire havested crop is sold.

3. *Gathering of berries, etc.* The gathering of berries is practiced chiefly by women and children. The entire crop is consumed by the family; it may represent a worth of $24.

4. *Pigs:* An average of 1.26 heads per family. Piglets are sold, for slaughter or for breeding at a price of $4 to $12 depending on their size. The total value of the marketed pigs is estimated at $40.

5. *Water buffaloes:* They average 1.94 heads per family, they serve as draught animals.

6. *Cows:* On the average there are 0.86 of them per Lao peasant family. They are used for draught animals. There are no milk cows in Laos.

7. *Poultry:* On the average there are 3.95 hens and 1.26 ducks per family, value amounts to $12.

8. *Fishery:* There are fish in ponds and rice fields owned by the family. The nearby river also provides our Lao family with fish. The annual consumption per family amounts to $24; occasional sales make $12.

In summing up consumption income, we have the total sale value of $160 while the family consumption is at $228. How about the family's expenses? On the average a family of seven needs 1 kilogram of salt per month (5 cents a kg.). They need also about 60 liters of paraffin oil per year totaling at $3.18. About $12 will be spent on sugar and milk (concentrated). The working-wear, shirts, and trousers for the two men will cost $24 (for the father and relative); the mother will need 6 skirts or *xin.* They are $1 a piece. The four children will need $12. Every two years the Lao family would also spend a total amount of $78 for their holiday attire. Another $24 will be spent for health care and like expenses. The family is likely to take part at the three *boons* (festivities) per annum and on each occasion they will spend about $6. Nails, strings and small repairs, etc., will cost the family $24. Therefore, after the overall transaction balance, the family may have saved no more than $15 per year. It is also useless to mention that there is no running water in the Lao houses and electricity is totally unknown to the majority of the peasants.

Chapter X

WISDOM VERSUS KNOWLEDGE

Laos became a French colony in 1893. It took the French almost a decade to come up with the idea of setting a secular education for the Laotians. The first school was built in 1902. It was a school for adult education, established mainly because of the colonial administration's increasing need for secretaries, interpreters,and minor functionaries. A second school was opened in 1905. This time, the elementary grades for children were included as well.

In 1917, by a French decree, the few schools that existed in Laos were made part of the Indochinese education system. Thus, there was a single and common educational system for schools in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, despite the great differences of many orders between the peoples of the three Indochinese countries. According to that decree, each Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian commune was to have one official primary school. The primary cycle included five grades. In 1938, the system was modified and subdivided into an "Elementary primary cycle" covering grades 1, 2, and 3, and a "Complementary primary cycle" for grade 4, 5, and 6.

Laos has been a country of 10,000 villages. In 1945, for instance, there were only 175 elementary schools in the whole kingdom. The first teachers were all French but little by little most of them were replaced by French-speaking Vietnamese personnel whom the French colonial administration had brought into Laos. I believe this was the first time that corporal punishment as a disciplinary method was introduced to the school system in Laos. Despite these innovations, the Lao parents have not understood the role of a secular school. To the majority of them, the Buddhist monks represent the highest human values, and by extension, they regard the Buddhist teachings as superior to the education from a secular school. Consequently, the misinterpretation of Westernized education by the Lao and the special nature of the common Indochinese educational system have proven to be very detrimental to Lao society. One example: in 1945, only a few chief provincial towns had schools. Within one school in Vientiane there were 1,150 Vietnamese students and only 850 Lao! Laos, because of this factor alone, for several decades would be deprived of qualified personnel in most of the sectors affecting the economic and cultural life of the whole country.

Although secular education had been compulsory since 1951, the Lao students were rather poorly prepared in academic terms. This was partly due to the scarcity of trained Lao teachers. Laos gained its independence from French in 1953, but in principle, up to 1975, the education system in Laos has been following the French pattern. There are three years of schooling in each of the two primary cycles: the elementary and the complementary. Junior high schooling is provided in a *collège* and a *lycée*. But only the *lycée* can give a complete secondary education. In all, it takes 13 years of schooling in Laos, excluding kindergarten, to be prepared for entering a higher education in a college or university.

It is useless to point out that both secondary and higher education are very limited in Laos. Only a few manage to graduate from the *lycée* every year. The happy graduates usually go directly to higher studies in Vietnam, Cambodia, or France. After 1960, the Laotian government also sent high school graduates to a few other countries.

Up to 1975, the subjects taught in Laotian primary schools were: ethics and civics, history, geography, arithmetic, drawing, manual work, singing, and physical education. Lao has become the language of instruction in primary schools. French is part of the curriculum, after entering grade 4. The curriculum in the high schools include: French, ethics and civics, history, geography, mathematics, music, drawing, manual work, physical education, and Lao. All lessons are given in French. On the contrary, Lao as a language is being taught only 2 hours a week.

It is not difficult to observe that the submission of the Lao to formal Buddhist doctrine is sometimes purely perfunctory. The ancient *phi* doctrine of thirty-two souls presiding over the thirty-two human organs is still very popular in the Lao families, because in reality the cult of spirits has completely succeeded in assimilating itself to the Lao Buddhism (See Chapter Two and Six). For centuries now, the Lao have come to believe that to succeed in any enterprise it is absolutely necessary to have the favor of the spirits. Consequently, in the day-to-day life, the Lao Buddhists will attach much importance to the acquisition of merit through the sponsorship of religious ceremonies and direct contributions in support of the Wat and its monks.

Naturally, the average layman respects the moral code and attempts to follow the basic rules of Buddhism. However, most Lao Buddhists have totally failed to understand the dialectics of the Eightfold Path in which the whole program of the enlisted eight items is governed by the Right Views, i.e. knowledge. In general, people are asking simple questions so to obtain simple answers. All Lao Buddhists consider wisdom more important or perhaps more necessary than knowledge, because it was explained to them that only wisdom will ultimately lead them towards *Nirvana*. Wisdom, people presume, is answering to the question of what is right and for whom, knowledge only responds to the question of what is possible and how. There is some justification for that because Enlightenment has always been the aim of Buddhist Teachings. Enlightenment should lead to Wisdom which in turn will pave the way to Deliverance from Suffering. Since so little was known to the Lao about secular education they also presume, wrongly, that knowledge could be obtained from the *school* while wisdom is possible only by going to the *wat* and supporting its monks.

Of course, there are fundamental differences between a secular school and a *Wat*, the Buddhist temple. Philosophically speaking, the school is aiming at success through education; the *wat* however, is guiding towards enlightenment through teachings. Another difference: while the brain and other physical conditions are essential in a school system, the mind is definitely more important and remains the focus of all Buddhist Teachings. Thus, the expression of a language is as important if not more than the language itself. There are also some significant differences in the methodology of teaching as well. In a school, different subjects are taught, the teacher plays an active role, and the students are learning through exercises; whereas in a *Wat* there are no students and no teachers. He who understands the true value and the logics of the paths and has successfully practiced the art of meditation is called a master. The one who is observing the Master so as to shape his own mind is called a disciple. The time, clockwise, which is so vital in any secular school, in terms of the student's graduation, has practically no meaning for a disciple's effort on the road to wisdom.

In general, I have the impression that either the Lao Buddhists have not understood the importance of learning, or they did but have chosen to neglect it. There are practically no books in Lao homes. People don't like to read. This general lack of interest in reading among the Lao has done much harm to the development of the Lao literature. The literary skills of the Lao, at the present time, are probably the lowest among Southeast Asian nations. Many of our Lao parents do not seem to be convinced that there is a need for much work and systematic efforts by both student and parent to ensure successful learning. I sincerely think that the popular Lao philosophy of "Wisdom versus Knowledge" is a wrong philosophy. The misinterpretation of Knowledge itself is much to be blamed. There is no substitute for learning. Wisdom and Knowledge are complementary to each other. There can be no Wisdom without Knowledge.

Therefore, Wisdom and Knowledge should never have been considered as alternative solutions to our mind.

It is obvious that the school, the milestone of the secular education, is rather a new concept to the traditional and cultural heritage of the Lao for whom the only "real" teaching institution is the local Buddhist temple or *wat*. In fact, due to the lack of a better understanding, the secular school is *Hong Hian* in Lao, which literally means *a building for learning*. It is interesting to observe that in the word *Hong Hian*, there is much more emphasis on the shape of the school building than on its function as a teaching institution.

In Buddhism, there is a great difference between wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is more than knowledge. Concentration of Mind, Morality, and Wisdom are the three parts englobing the Eightfold Path. Buddhism has determined "Ignorance" as the cause for suffering (See Chapter Two on the Four Noble Truths). The Fourth Truths describes the "Way" to Deliverance from Suffering and the Eightfold Path is using the Right Views, i.e. Knowledge to oppose Ignorance. The eight items of the Path are:

1. Right Views
2. Right Intentions

WISDOM

3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Living
6. Right Effort

MORALITY

7. Right Attention
8. Right Concentration

CONCENTRATION OF MIND

However most Lao Buddhists, including the monks themselves, have a minimal doctrinal knowledge. The majority of monks do not understand enough Pali, the language of Buddhist scriptures, and could not, therefore, grasp the essence of the sacred texts. Of course, the average Lao layman understands even less. But there is one *Wat* in nearly every sizable village of Laos.

Chapter XI

THE LAO LITERATURE

In broad terms, the Lao literature derives largely from Indic sources. It is divided into the sacred and the profane. Buddhism dominates the strictly religious literature, but a variety of legends, tales, and poetry are dedicated to the values of Brahmanism. Most of the Lao literary heritage is preserved in written form. There are two writing systems used in recording the Lao literature: the *Tham* alphabets and the *Lao* alphabets. *Tham* is a special Lao sacred script mostly used to record Buddhist texts which are written, usually, in Pali characters. The *Tham* script is rather restricted to the Buddhist temples. The Lao alphabets, on the other hands, represent the national language of Laos, therefore, all of the modern texts are written in the Lao language.

Technically, most of the Buddhist literature and Hindu tales in existence in Laos were originally written on palm leaf manuscripts. The characters were carved into the palm leaf and blackened through the rubbing of the mixture of powdered charcoal. There were 1,163 of such manuscripts counted in the Lao national collection in 1917. However, this number did not include thousands of the manuscripts in private homes and remote pagodas throughout the country. Why are those manuscripts necessary in a country where the illiteracy rate is so high? One of the answers is that most of the Lao believe in supernatural forces; the physical manuscript itself is considered equally powerful if not more powerful than its textual content.

In the Lao tradition, words are very powerful according to their written existence. James R. Chamberlain, an outstanding specialist in the Lao language, once wrote about the power of the palm leaf manuscripts:

> *When invading armies entered a city, one of the first acts was to remove the manuscripts, the heart of the city's power as it were. A chief abbot from northern Thailand once ordered all manuscripts from the temples in his district to be piled in the temple grounds and burned, all the histories, the poetry, the Buddhist texts. The ashes were used to make protective amulets; the sacred power of the words was thus transformed and contained within the amulets.*

Although most of the ancient Lao literature is preserved in written form, the Lao prefer to present their literary legacy orally. Folk tales, proverbs, children's stories, and highly sophisticated poems are all included in the classification of oral literature.

Local variations may be introduced or invented according to the inspiration of the narrator. Many Lao narrators can recite a six-hour-poem (*roman en vers*) entirely from memory. The narrators who possess this kind of recitation skill may hear a new story only once and be able to recite it from memory without major mistakes.

The sung poetry is another form of the very popular oral literature in Laos. It is called *lam* or *khap*. At festivals, "courts of love" were set up in the temple's courtyard in which, sitting in sex-segregated rows, the young people would engage to demonstrate their interest, and to express their affection for each other through the exchanges of poetry and songs. This is an excellent opportunity to excel at recitation. Some *lam* performances are exchanges of skill between a man and a woman. In other types of *lam*, there is no interaction involved and a single performer is in charge of the "show". Still a single performance of the Lao *lam* may last all night. In a few cases, where there are good poets who are in love with each other, the interactions may last up to 72 hours without sleep.

The three important masterpieces of Lao literature are *Vetsantrasadok*, *Sin Say*, and *Thao Hung* or *Khoun Cheuang* (See Chapter Four). *Vetsantrasadok* is the most popular. Every year in Laos, there is a special festival day called the *Boon Mahasat* purposely set to entertain the Lao people through the reading or listening to the Vetsandone story. This is a story dealing with the previous life of the Buddha immediately preceding his rebirth as Prince Gautama. The main theme of the story is the reincarnation process; the chief purpose of reincarnation is education. The basic principle in the Buddhist education is *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the doctrine of virtue and right conduct which implies rights and duties of each individual. The moral law sustains and favors those who abide by it. *Karma* is the instrument which will span this life and the afterdeath, assessing one lifetime to another, rewarding the just and punishing the evil. Ultimately, those who live in harmony with Dharma will reach a state in which rebirth is no longer necessary; that state is *Nirvana*.

Sin Say, the other literary masterpiece, written in the most sophisticated style and in the most exquisite Lao poetic form by the poet Phangkham, is based on an older version. The story of *Sin Say* is also well known in Cambodia and Thailand. Sin Say is the name of a hero who was given the mission to rescue his father's younger sister. The Sin Say story brings us back into the Hindu universe. Since the Indian pantheon is overwhelming in its diversity, there are many gods. Thus, Sin Say was born with a bow and holding arrows in his hand. Then came his brother

Sang Thong, a golden snail. At the same time, their half-brother, an elephant with golden tusks was also born. The story tells how the three brothers defeat the ogre Nhak Koumphan who has stolen their aunt.

Thao Hung, the third Lao literary masterpiece, is non-Buddhist material in nature. Thao Hung, the main character, is not a Lao but a Khom of the Mon-Khmer ethnic group. In fact, characters in *Thao Hung* are of pre-Buddhist origin. *Thao Hung* is a historical epic in nature. There is a rich description of animistic festivals and how sacrifices were offered to spirits. There are no Buddhist precepts being taught or lessons being learned in *Thao Hung*. Because of this, the Buddhist-dominated Lao people think in general that the *Thao Hung* epic should not be read on festival days with the exception of the Rocket Festival which is characterized by much drunkenness and ribaldry. In the old days, the manuscript of *Thao Hung* itself could not be recorded on the palm leaf and had to be scratched on strips of green bamboo. *Thao Hung* is essentially a story of struggles between many branches of a few ruling dynastic families in the ancient times of Indochina. It is not simply an account of battle. Warriors are portrayed with their actions in both a moral and heroic context. The legend of *Thao Hung* is still very much alive among the Mon-Khmer speaking people of Laos and Vietnam. Some do believe that one day Khoun Cheuang will come back and rescue the Khom or Khmu people.

Chapter XII

THE LAO AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

In spite of a hundred years of foreign involvements in the modern history of the Laotian kingdom, the Lao people know very little about the outside world. The Lao certainly know almost nothing about the great civilizations of the Western world. In fact, the current knowledge of the Lao about the Lao themselves is extremely poor. Our ignorance is very apparent when we Lao come to the cross-cultural section of the multiethnic population of Laos. We are ignorant but not indifferent about the matter.

This absence of knowledge of the Lao about the outside world and about themselves is a cumulative effect of many factors combined. The specific geographical position of Laos is partly to be blamed for the existing deplorable situation. On the other hand, Buddhism does not encourage the Lao to seek new explanations of life or to engage in the exploration of other peoples' culture and civilization. But most certainly, I think, the proverbial inertia and incompetence of the Laotian central executive power was the deciding factor limiting the Lao people's access to the major civilization of mankind.

1. *Geographical factors.* Laos covers about 91,000 square miles, or if you prefer, nearly the size of the state of Oregon. Laos is situated between the 15th and 25th parallels north of the equator. There are no railroads. Many roads are closed to communication for six months in every year, and Laos is a matrix of mountains, plateaus, and plains. Most of the Lao live by the rivers in the lowlands, therefore, the Mekong River and its left-bank tributaries serve quite efficiently as a major link of communication among the Lao. However, the Mekong cannot serve as a waterway for an international exchange. There are too many rapids, and the double *Li Phi* Falls near the Cambodian border are impassable at any time of the year.

To the North, Laos borders with Yunnan, a southern province of China. There, across the Chinese border, the Lao do not have much to learn from because the whole area is inhabited by the same minority ethnic groups which have also resettled themselves in Laos. Besides, the Chinese civilization was born and brought up in relative isolation from other civilizations of mankind. China herself has never been an outward-looking country.

The Mekong marks a long boundary with Thailand to the West. Thailand, undoubtedly, is in a better position to understand Westerners, and the ethnic Siamese Thais have considerably modernized their way of life during the last hundred years. But the Lao have had only a limited benefit from the common border with Thailand because the Lao do not have a direct contact with the Siamese Thais. The whole northeastern part of Thailand is inhabited by a population entirely composed of the Lao ethnics who are as little informed as their own brothers and sisters in Laos. The language, values, and living patterns are identical for the people of both sides of the Mekong.

From Cambodia which is to the South, the Lao people have learned a great deal. Most of what the Lao got from the ancient Khmer kingdom constitutes basic elements of the Lao culture up to the present time. Brahmanism, Theravada Buddhism, classical music, and dances all have come to Laos from Cambodia in the distant past. Although contacts between the Lao and Khmer people had been less frequent in modern times, some twenty years ago, many Lao students and aristocrats went to Phnom-Penh for higher education and other professional training.

The Lao would have learned so much from Vietnam which borders with Laos to the east, but the Annam Cordillera is a formidable barrier to communication between the two countries. The Annam Cordillera is a range of mountains with peaks rising to 8,000 feet, thus, forming a natural border line between Laos and Vietnam. Of all the Indochinese peoples, the Vietnamese had been the most exposed to the outside world, both culturally and politically. There had been a thousand years of Chinese domination in Vietnam's history, then came Western power, specifically the French colonial power. The Vietnamese people are quick learners and could therefore assimilate many philosophical thoughts and technical wisdom into their own culture for their own benefits. Confucianism was adopted to cement the kinship between families. thereby preparing a solid foundation for a strong and homogeneous nation. The French language was learned and the romanization of the Vietnamese language was adopted almost instantly. French was the key for Vietnamese intellectuals to explore the civilizations of the Western world. The romanization of the Vietnamese tongue was necessary for a better and easier way of communication among themselves. Anyway, the Lao would still have had to learn the Vietnamese language in order to understand what the Vietnamese themselves have to say. Yes, language is a major obstacle between the two peoples at both sides of the Annam Cordillera.

2. *Religious and educational factors.* Laos is made up of 10,000 small villages. The Lao villagers are committed Theravada Buddhists. There are thousands of pagodas in the Lao country, and the Buddhist monk has traditionally been regarded the best teacher a boy could have. Until very recently, the only formal education in Laos was to be found in the local pagoda. In a Buddhist monastic education, one does not learn about geography nor social science. Much time is devoted to teaching manual arts and reverence for Gautama Buddha and the king. The Buddhist monk also teaches discipline, morality, and respect for elders. His disciples will learn all the practical skills needed in order to become active participants in a traditional Lao village society. Instruction is given orally, with emphasis on memory training. Consequently, after such a school, many who have attended it may tell you much more about the Naga world, the Garuda world, etcetera, but they will have a hard time guessing whether Vietnam is to the north, the south, the left, or the right of their own village.

The French secular school system spread very slowly. The elementary schools were not set up in a significant number until the end of the Second World War. Although the French colonial administrators were in need of secretaries and interpreters, they did not care to educate the Lao people. Subsequently, even after more than fifty years of French domination, only a small proportion of the Lao had actually been exposed to the Western influence to any effective degree. How could it be otherwise when only one senior high school was available in the whole kingdom? The school itself is in the faraway capital city of Vientiane. All the graduation tests had to be flown back to France for final evaluation with the eventual results being communicated to students three months later. Even if some were successful in passing the final tests, there was still little chance for the Lao students to continue their studies. In those days, there was not a single university built in Laos, subsequently, only a handful of children belonging to a few wealthy elite families could afford to go abroad for higher education. This, in my opinion, was the main factor causing the stagnation of the intellectual development of the Lao in the past. After the French departure in 1954 the country's affairs were left to the Lao. The French also left behind many incompetent clerks and interpreters serving their colonial administration. These people were to become the high and highest officials in the newly independent Lao administration. Obviously these officials could not understand the importance of education and the public information system in structuring the course of their nation's destiny. All the consecutive governments failed to come up with ideas and programs to enhance the social mobility needed for a broad educational opportunity for the Lao middle class. The Lao aristocracy itself had only a few Western educated and Western oriented intellectuals. On the other hand, the lives of the common people had been plagued with all kinds of insecurities. The civil war of the last three decades was another factor causing a very high illiteracy rate in the country. Therefore, the effectiveness of the printed word had to be severely limited under those circumstances. Verbal communication is the most important source of information to the majority of the Lao. However, the public information system itself is quite primitive and doesn't provide the Lao people with programs which inform them about the outside world. As a result, the world view of many Lao does not extend much beyond the few hundred square miles where they are to work and live. This is not a cynical statement but a factual situation of our realities.

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HUYNH DINH TE

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Chapter I

THE PHYSICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING OF VIETNAMESE CULTURE

PHYSICAL SETTING

Vietnam is situated on the eastern coast of the Indochinese peninsula, extending from the China border in the north to the Gulf of Thailand in the south. To the west, Vietnam borders with Cambodia and Laos; to the east, lies the South China Sea. The history and cultural characteristics of Vietnam owe much to its geographical position. It is at the crossroads of two major Asian cultures: the Chinese culture from the north and the Indian culture from the west.

Situated between 8°33' and 23°22' latitude north, Vietnam is a country of 127,000 square miles (slightly smaller than Japan and a little larger than the United Kingdom). North Vietnam is characterized by a mountainous terrain interspersed with deep valleys, the most important of which is that of the Red River Delta. Central Vietnam is a long narrow corridor between the Trường-Sơn Mountain and the sea, made up of a series of small coastal plains. Southern Vietnam is a flat country formed by the Mekong Delta which is the most productive agricultural area in Vietnam.

Vietnam is essentially a tropical country with varied climate. In the north there are four distinct seasons while in the center and the south there are only two seasons: the dry season and the rainy season. The rains are relatively abundant throughout the country. The average annual rainfall is 58.5 inches.

The population of Vietnam is about 56 million with the majority living in the lowlands. The ethnic and geographical origins of the Vietnamese people are still a matter of controversy. The common theory is that the Vietnamese resulted from a mixture of the Viet tribes from the Yang Tse Kiang valley in China and the inhabitants of the Red River Delta originally coming from Indonesia. There are several ethnic minorities in Vietnam; the most important ones are Chinese, Mountain tribesmen and Cambodians.

The Chinese are the largest minority, about one million and a half before 1975, with a large concentration in the Chinatown of Cholon in South Vietnam. They play a predominant role in the economic life of the country. The second largest minority is the mountain tribesmen, about one million people, belonging to more than 30 different tribes of the Malayo-Polynesian and Mon-

Khmer ethnic stocks. In the mountainous regions of North Vietnam live the Thái, the Mán, the Mèo, the Mường, the Nùng, and the Lolo tribes. In the mountainous regions of Central Vietnam there are the Rhadé, the Bahnar, Jarai, the Stieng tribes, etc. The Chams (who once formed a strong empire in what now is Central Vietnam) live in the lowlands of the southern part of Central Vietnam and number about 20,000 people. The third largest minority is the Cambodians, numbering about 700,000, and living in the provinces near the Cambodian border. Other smaller ethnic groups are Malays, Indians, Pakistanis, and French. Most of these ethnic groups left Vietnam in 1975.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Vietnam has a recorded history of more than two thousand years. The history of the Vietnamese people is characterized by a remarkable energy and a strong sense of national identity which enable them to survive as a nation despite long periods of foreign domination.

Prehistoric Period (until 111 B.C.)

According to legends, the first Vietnamese kingdom was established in the Red River Delta. The first dynasty, Hông Bàng, reigned from 2879 to 258 B.C. The Kingdom was called Văn-Lang. The first historical records pertaining to Vietnam were written by the Chinese in the third century. Earlier Chinese accounts mention a kingdom of the Viet south of the Yang Tse River around 500 B.C. In 258 the Kingdom of Văn-Lang collapsed and was replaced by the Kingdom of Âu-Lạc founded by Thục An Dưởng Vưởng. In 207 B.C., this Kingdom succumbed to the Chinese general Triệu-Dà who established the Kingdom of Nam-Việt and founded the Triệu Dynasty (207-111 B.C.). Although a Chinese dynasty, the Triệu were independent of the central authority in China.

Chinese domination (111 B.C. - 938 A.D)

In 111 B.C. China sent troops to conquer the Kingdom of Nam-Viêt and established direct rule over the country which was renamed Giao-Chỉ and turned it into a province of the Chinese empire. The Chinese domination lasted for more than one thousand years, interspersed with short periods of successful uprising and independence: the revolt of the Trửng Sisters in 39-43 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Vạn-Xuân by the Lý in 543-603. Despite ruthless control of the Chinese and the overwhelming influence of Chinese culture, the Vietnamese people still kept their national identity and never ceased to strive for national independence throughout the long period of Chinese domination.

Era of Independence (938-1883)

In 938, Ngô Quyền defeated the Chinese forces at Bạch-Đằng River and liberated the country from Chinese domination, thus starting a new era of national independence and prosperity. During the period of independence, which lasted for more than nine hundred years, Vietnam was successively ruled by the following dynasties: Ngô (938-944), Đinh (968-980), Anterior Lê (980-1000), Lý (1010-1214), Trần (1225-1400), Hồ (1400-1407), Posterior Lê (1428-1788), Tây-Sơn (1786-1802), and Nguyễn (1802-1945). There was a short period of Chinese domination of 20 years between 1407-1427.

The period of independence was characterized by the efforts of the Vietnamese people to repeal the Chinese invasion from the North, to expand their territory towards the South at the expense of the Chams and Cambodians, and to develop a culture of their own. The Vietnamese successfully rolled back Chinese invasion on several occasions: in 1076 under the Lý dynasty, three times under the Trần dynasty in 1257, 1284-85, and 1287-88 when general Trần Hưng Đạo tore the Mongolian troops to shreds on Bạch-Đằng River, in 1418-28 with Lê Lợi, who defeated the Ming armies of occupation in Vietnam and in 1788 with King Quang-Trung. The "march towards the South" seriously began under the Lý dynasty when King Lý ThánhTông annexed the two provinces of Quảng Bình and Quảng Trị of the Chams in 1069. In 1306, two more provinces of the Chams were added to Vietnam through the marriage of Princess Huyền Trân to King Chế-Mân. Under the Lê dynasty more territory was annexed from the Chams. The last Cham territory was annexed in the 16th century. The southward expansion was completed in 1780 when Vietnam reached the southern-most tip of the Indochinese peninsula. It was under the Nguyễn dynasty that Vietnam attained its present boundaries.

French domination (1858-1954)

The era of independence came to end in the latter part of the nineteenth century when Vietnam was conquered by the French. The conquest started with the capture of Đànẵng in

1858 and was completed in 1883 when Hànội fell to the French and King Tụ-Đức was forced to sign the Treaty of August 25, 1883 in which Vietnam became a French protectorate. Vietnam then lost its political identity and unity. The French divided the country into three separate regions—Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina—each with a different form of administration, and merged them into the Union of French Indochina which also included Cambodia and Laos.

During the French domination, which lasted until 1954, the Vietnamese people had never ceased to fight for freedom and national independence. When the Second World War broke out, Japanese troops occupied Indochina with the consent of the French. In March 1945, the Japanese disarmed the French and put an end to the French domination in Indochina. When the Japanese surrendered to the Allies in August 1945, the Vietnamese people proclaimed Vietnam's independence and established a republican form of government on the abdication of Bảo-Đai, the last King of the Nguyễn dynasty. But the French soon tried to reconquer Indochina with help of the British and Chinese troops which were entrusted with disarming the defeated Japanese troops. However, the French could not reoccupy the whole country as they would. They met with a fierce resistance from Vietnamese people. But the resistance movement was soon monopolized by the communists who succeeded in liquidating all the nationalist leaders and those who were against their plan to turn Vietnam into a Communist country. In 1954, the Geneva Agreement officially put an end to the French rule in Indochina. This agreement also divided Vietnam into two separate states along the 17th parallel with North Vietnam under communist control and South Vietnam under a non-communist regime. But Communist North Vietnam soon attempted to conquer the South. A civil war began, with China and the Soviet Union providing aid to North Vietnam and the United States providing aid to South Vietnam. A fierce and merciless guerrilla war went on for almost twenty years, causing death and destruction to both North and South. The Paris Agreement in 1973 brought about the end of U.S. involvement in South Vietnam. Two years later, Communist North Vietnam launched an offensive and conquered the South on April 30, 1975. Vietnam was then reunited under the communist regime. Hundreds of thousands of people fled for fear of persecution by the new regime and sought asylum in the free world, especially in the United States, France, Canada, and Australia. That was the first time in the history of Vietnam that an exodus of such magnitude took place.

Appendix 1

A SYNOPSIS OF VIETNAMESE HISTORY

DATE	NAME OF DYNASTY	NAME OF KINGDOM
BC 2879-111	*PREHISTORIC PERIOD*	
2879-258	Hồng Bàng	Văn-Lang
258-207	Thuc	Âu-Lạc
207-111	Triêu	Nam-Việt
BC 111-938 AD	*CHINESE DOMINATION*	Giao-Chỉ (Chinese province)
BC 111-39 AD	First Period	
39-43	The Trưng Sisters	
44-543	Second Period	
544-602	Anterior Lý	Vạn-Xuân
603-938	Third Period	
938-1858	*INDEPENDENCE ERA*	
938-944	Ngô	
944-968	Twelve Feudal Lords	
968-980	Đinh	Đại-Cồ-Việt
980-1000	Anterior Lê	
1010-1214	Posterior Lý	Đại-Cồ-Việt
1225-1400	Trần	An-Nam
1400-1407	Hồ	Đại-Ngu
1407-1427	Chinese Invasion	
1428-1786	Posterior Lê	Đại-Việt
	1527: Mạc Lords	
	1592: Trịnh Lords	
	Rivalry between Trịnh and Nguyễn Lords	
1786-1802	Tây Sơn	
1802-1945	Nguyễn	Việt-Nam
1858-1954	*FRENCH DOMINATION*	
1945-54	French War	
1954	Geneva Agreement and partition of North and South Vietnam and U.S. intervention.	
1975	*COMMUNIST VICTORY*	

VIETNAMESE HISTORY IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE

	Vietnam	China	World
3000 BC	2879-111BC *Prehistoric Period*	Legendary Emperor Huang Ti	Pharonic rule in Egypt
	2879-258 Legendary Hồng Bàng Dynasty	Hsia Dynasty	
		Shang Dynasty (1700 1122)	Phoenician alphabet invented
		Chou Dynasty (1122-256)	Greeks destroyed Troy (1193)
		Lao Tse Confucius (551-479)	Legendary founding of Rome (752)
500 BC	258-111 Thục Dynasty Triệu Dynasty	Chin Dynasty Great Wall built (215 BC) Western Han (206-9 AD)	Alexander the Great
	111-938 Chinese Domination		Julius Caesar (100-44) Roman Empire Cleopatra (51 BC) Jesus Christ
AD 1	Trưng Sisters (39-43) Revolt of Lady Triệu	Hsin Dynasty (9-23) Eastern Han (23-220) Three Kingdoms (220-265) Six Dynasties (317-589)	

continued

500	Vạn Xuân Kingdom (544-602) Independence (938-1858) Ngô Đinh Lê (Anterior)	Sui Dynasty (590-618) Tang Dynasty (618-907) Five Dynasties (907-960) Sung Dynasty (960-1279)	King Arthur killed (537) Mohammed (570-632) Charlemagne (742-814) Alfred the Great (871)
1000	Lý Trần (Mongolian invasion repealed) Hồ Chinese Invasion Lê (Posterior)	Yuan Dynasty (Mongolian) (1279-1368) Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	Norman Conquest (1066) The Crusades (1095-1291) Magna Carta (1215) Joan of Arc burned (1431) Columbus discovered America (1492)
1500	Tẩy Sơn (1773) Chinese invasion defeated by Quang Trung (1786)	Ching Dynasty (Manchu) (1644-1912)	Queen Elizabeth I Shakespeare Jamestown established Louis XIV built Versailles (1661) US Declaraton of Independence (1776) US Constitution (1787) French Revolution (1789)
1800	Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945) French Domination (1858-1954)	Opium War (1839-42)	Napoleon I (1804) US Civil War (1861-65)

continued

1900		Nationalist Revolution (1911)	World War I (1914-18) Hilter to power (1933)
	French war (1945-54)	Communist took power in China (1949)	World War II (1939-45)
	Geneva Agreement (1954) South Vietnam (1954-75) American Intervention		
1975	Communists took over whole Vietnam		

OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE FRENCH DOMINATION OF VIETNAM

1857: French troops attacked Đà-Nẵng (Central Vietnam).

1858: Đà-Nẵng captured.

1861: Saigon captured.

1862: The Vietnamese Court in Huê:
a) ceded Saigon and adjacent areas to France.
b) agreed to pay a war indemnity.

1867: The Western part of South Vietnam taken by the French who ruled over the whole southern part of Vietnam.

1883: North Vietnam captured by the French. The August 25, 1883 Treaty signed: Vietnam's independence ended.

1887: Foundation of French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos).

1885: Uprising against the French by Emperor Hàm-Nghi who was sent in exile in 1888.

1893: Uprising led by Phan-Đình Phùng and Đề Thám

1806: Nationalist movements led by Cường-Để, Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh.

1916: Revolt by Emperor Duy Tân who was sent in exile by the French.

1930: Revolt by Nguyễn Thái Học, the Nationalist Party's Leader, in Yên Bái.

1940: Revolt at Gia-Định, Hóc Môn, South Vietnam.

1941: Uprising in Nghệ-An.

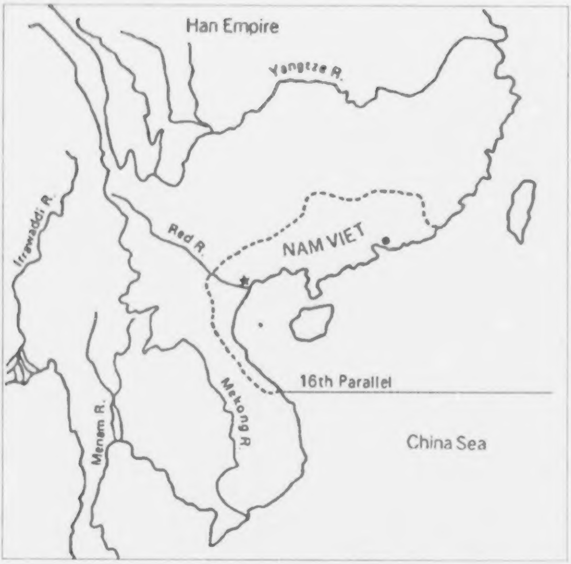
1945: (March) French troops disarmed by the Japanese army of occupation in Indochina

(August) Declaration of Independence and establishment of a republican form of government in Vietnam. Abdication of Emperor Bảo-Đại.

(September) Attempts by the French to reconquer Vietnam.

1945-1954 Resistance movement against the French.

1954 French defeat at Điện Biện Phủ. The Geneva Agreement put an end to French colonialism in Indochina.

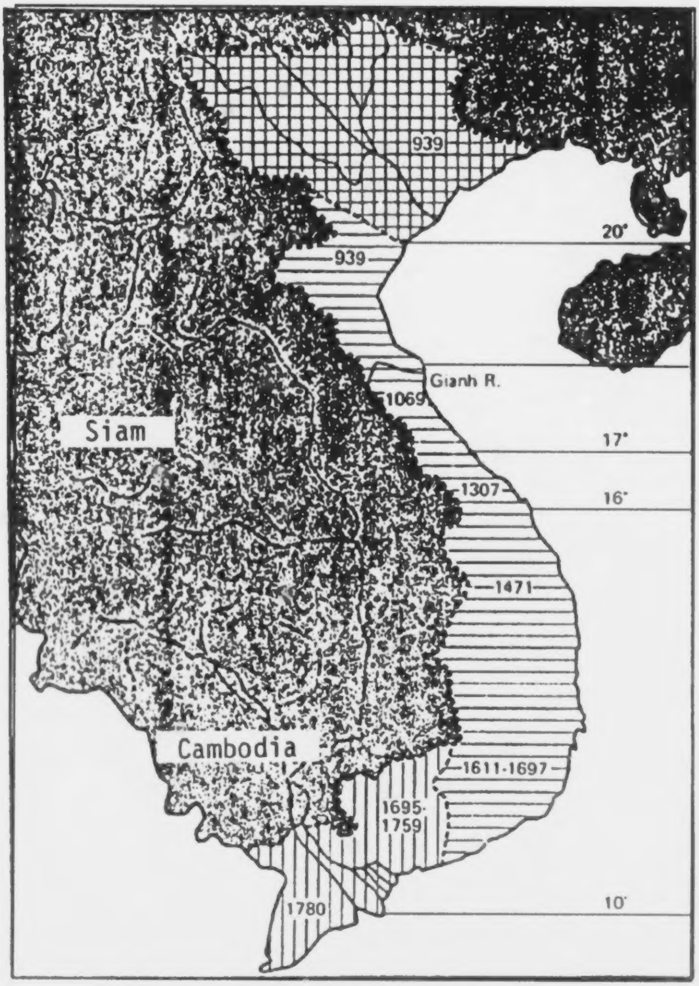

Han Empire
Yangtze R.
Irrawaddi R.
Red R.
NAM VIET
16th Parallel
China Sea
Mekong R.
Menam R.

NAM VIET AS OF 211 B.C.

•Phiên Ngu (near Canton), capital of Nam Việt

★Cổ Lao (near Hanoi), capital of the Vietnamese state of Âu Lạc, which preceded Nam Việt

Source: Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Viet-Nam: Histoire et civilization* (Paris, 1955), map 2


939
20°
939
Giang R.
1069
Siam
17°
1307
16°
1471
Cambodia
1611-1697
1695-1759
1780
10°

THE FORMATION OF VIETNAM: 939-1780

(Dates show the time each area was incorporated into the Vietnamese state.)

Main divisions of Vietnam in the nineteenth century, with Vietnamese, French, and English names

▦ Bắc Bộ
Tonkin
North Vietnam

▤ Trung Bộ
Annam
Central Vietnam

▥ Nam Bộ
French Cochinchina
South Vietnam

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Chapter II

MAN IN RELATION TO HIMSELF

STATUS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Despite his concern for a certain amount of individuality, the Vietnamese is not an individualist. As we will see in the next chapter, in Vietnamese culture the individual's interests and destiny are rarely conceived outside the framework of his immediate and extended families. Anything a Vietnamese does, he usually does out of family consideration rather than for himself.

As an individual, the Vietnamese usually endeavors to live in harmony with himself as well as with the outer world of man and nature. Harmony with oneself is achieved by the acceptance of life and the world. To the Vietnamese, life is the most precious property to which no material possession can be compared. As a proverb puts it, *a man alive is worth more than a pile of gold.* The preservation of the self is not only a personal responsibility of the individual to himself but also an individual's responsibility toward his family. This recognition of the importance of the physical self distinguishes the mentality of the Vietnamese from the Hindu which is *characterized chiefly by the importance generally given to the world of the spirit, often carried to the extreme of despising, reproving, nay, considering as non-existent any material aspect of life.* (Jean Canu, 1952).

Harmony with oneself is achieved by observing moderation and by avoiding extremes. The reason behind the attitude of moderation in food and drink is not only the body's safety but also the moral desire to keep one's dignity unimpaired. Moderation and caution in speech constitute a distinctive feature of Vietnamese culture. Since childhood, the Vietnamese is taught to think deeply before opening his mouth, and, in the words of a well-known proverb, *to open his mouth only when asked to and to answer only when beckoned to.* This attitude is partly prompted by the belief that wise and talented people are modest in action and speech. Bragging reflects an empty soul. Moderation and caution in speech are also motivated by the awareness of the danger of verbal excess which can bring about discord and animosity. It is commonly believed that hasty words and slips of tongue are as devastating as hasty actions and bad deeds. Because of this cultural bias, the Vietnamese often appear to be reserved, non- responsive and non-assertive by American standards. This is particularly true with the behavior of Vietnamese children in the school in which they rarely volunteer an answer for fear of being mistaken as trying to "show off". They would rather wait until called upon by the teacher to give an answer, for since early childhood, they have been taught "to talk only when talked to and to answer only when asked to". This attitude is also motivated by the fear of "losing face", should the answer be a wrong one. (The concept of face will be discussed in Chapter IV).

Certain virtues seem to have a greater appeal to the Vietnamese than the others. Most conspicuous are moderation, modesty, moral probity and self-control, qualities which make him a "refined, well-mannered" person. The term of criticism that the Vietnamese fears most is "ill-bred" (*đồ mất dạy*) which deals a mortal blow not only to his ego but also his sense of filial piety and the honor of his family.

NAMING SYSTEM

Besides the physical self, perhaps the single thing that confers identity and individuality to a person is his name. (In his own country, the Vietnamese does not have a social security number). The naming system of the Vietnamese is different from that of Americans and most of other Asian peoples.

A Vietnamese name usually consists of three components —family name, middle name, and given name— which *always* occur in that order. For a number of people, the name consists of family and given names only. Because of the order of occurrence of the family name (always first) and the given name (always last) in the Vietnamese sequence of names, such terms as "first name" and "last name" commonly used by Americans are very confusing for Vietnamese people who are not familiar with American culture. The use of such terms as "family name" and "personal name" would help avoid this confusion.

Unlike Americans, a Vietnamese is *always* called by his/her given name and referred to by his full name, and never by his family name alone. The given name or the middle name is never abbreviated. Thus a man whose name is *Nguyễn Văn Tâm* (always written in this order) will be called *Tâm* by his friends and members of his family and *Mr. Tâm* by all other people. A Vietnamese given name preceded by a title is practically an equivalent to the American last name and, without a title, it is an equivalent to the American first name.

After marriage, a Vietnamese woman still keeps her maiden name as her legal name and does not change to her husband's last name. In informal circumstances, she will be referred to by her given name or her husband's, but in formal circumstances, she will be referred to by her maiden name in full, preceded by the title *Mrs.* Vietnamese names, especially names of those who are above us in social status, age, or rank in the family hierarchy, have a certain "taboo" quality. When talking to somebody who is not a close friend or a person who is senior to him in age or status, the Vietnamese tends to avoid mentioning that person's name. To do so would be impolite and insolent.

Appendix 2

WHAT'S YOUR NAME? A STUDY IN CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

What's your (last) name? This simple question, so easy for most foreigners who speak some English is, for the Vietnamese—even those who speak English fluently—a question to which a right answer is hard to give. The difficulty does not lie in the meaning of the term *name* but in the use of names which is different in American and Vietnamese societies. American people who are familiar with Vietnamese habits and customs epitomize the difference in the following statement: *They put their names in the wrong order, the last name is written first and the first, last.* This, however, is not the whole story. The best way to bring out the difference is, perhaps, to describe how names are used in Vietnamese society.

A Vietnamese name, e.g. *Nguyễn Văn Hai*, usually consists of three parts occurring in the following order: family name (*Nguyễn*), middle name (*Văn*), and given name (*Hai*). Some people do not have, or simply omit, middle names.

Generally speaking, a Vietnamese *family name* does not have any meaning or, at least, its meaning is no longer apparent to the common people. Unlike Americans, Vietnamese are never known by their family names (the first element of their names). A Vietnamese is always called by his given name. His family name appears only in a full name but never in isolation. There are a few exceptions to this general practice, however, and these are motivated by political reasons. Hồ Chí Minh was known as President Hồ (or Uncle Hồ) and Ngô Đình Diệm was called President Ngô because their followers wanted to sort them out from the rest of the nation and elevate them to the status of a divine ruler. Calling them by their given names would be a mark of irreverence amounting to sacrilege. (In the old days, only the King was not referred to by his given name but by his dynasty name. Referring to the King by his given name was a sacrilegious act punishable by imprisonment or even death.)

There are about one hundred family names for the whole population estimated at about 56 million, but only a score of these such as *Nguyễn, Lê, Trần, Phạm, Phan, Trường*, etc... are of frequent occurrence. This may partly explain why Vietnamese people are not called by their family names. There are too many people having the same (family) name. Some family names are indicative of the ethnic origin of the bearers (Chinese, Cham, Cambodian, Mường, others may have two different spellings and pronunciations such as *Võ: Vũ, Hoàng: Hùynh*, resulting from the practice of euphemism.

Given names usually have a meaning and parents often choose for their children names which reflect their aspirations and ideals. There can be as many given names as there are words in the Vietnamese language. Some of the common names are words denoting qualities and virtues (*Trung*: fidelity; *Hùng*: courage; *Liêm*: integrity); the seasons (*Xuân*: Spring; *Thu*: Autumn); flowers (*Hồng*: rose; *Lan*: orchid); fruits (*Nho*: grape; *Lê*: pear); natural phenomena and celestial bodies (*Tuyết*: snow; *Vân*: cloud; *Nguyệt*: the moon). Girls' names are frequently chosen from words denoting virtues, things that are beautiful, sweet, fragrant or melodious but these are not exclusively feminine names. Any name can be used for boys or girls although some names are used more often for girls than boys. In general, a given name consists of one word but it's becoming more and more frequent to give girls a two word name (or compound name like *Thu-Hồng*, *Bích-Hồng*, *Cẩm-Hồng*, *Thúy-Hồng*, instead of the single word *Hồng*. Boys may sometimes take a two-word name but this tends to be less common. As mentioned earlier, a man whose name is Nguyễn Văn Hai will be called *Mr. Hai* (given name) and never *Mr. Nguyễn*.

After marriage, a Vietnamese woman still keeps her own name and never combines her name with her husband's. Thus, a woman whose name is *Nguyễn Thị Thu-Hồng* married to a man whose name is *Trần Văn Tâm* will be (officially and legally) called *Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Thu-Hồng* and not *Trần Thị Thu-Hồng* or *Tâm Thị Thu-Hồng*. She may be called *Mrs. Trần Văn Tâm* but most often her papers still bear the name *Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Thu-Hồng*.

The Vietnamese given name, when preceded by a term of address like Mr., Mrs., Dr., Rev., etc... is practically an equivalent to the American last name. The given name used by itself is somewhat similar to the American first name. However, in Vietnamese society (given) names, especially names of those who are above us in social status, age or rank in the extended family, have a certain "taboo" quality. When talking to somebody who is not a close friend, Vietnamese people tend to avoid mentioning his name. This practice is also transferred to their intercourse with American people. Even when they speak English, they tend to avoid mentioning the (last) name of their interlocutor, especially when the interlocutor is their teacher or their boss. In Vietnamese society the greatest insult you can give to someone is to mention his father's or mother's given names. Because of this "taboo" quality names are carefully chosen when they are given to newborn babies so as to avoid names of one's parents, ancestors, relatives and close friends.

Vietnamese *middle names* are used for various purposes. They are used to differentiate a man's name from a woman's since there are practically no given names which are exclusively masculine or feminine. The common middle name for women is *Thị* or, less commonly, *Nữ*. So, *Nguyễn Văn Hai* is a man and *Nguyễn Thị Hai* is a woman. There is, however, a tendency among the younger generation to drop the *Thị* from their names, thus eliminating the indication of their sex. Middle names for men are more varied. Some of the common are: *Văn, Đình, Hữu, Đức, Trọng*, etc. Middle names often represent a branch as distinguished from other branches of a larger family. In this case, the same middle name is shared by the members of different generations who belong to the same branch. For some people, the same middle name is used by members of the same generation to distinguish them from members of other generations. Sometimes a middle name is used to reinforce, qualify, or make the given name more meaningful. Take, for instance, *Nguyên Danh*, whose given name means (good) "reputation". With the middle name *Lửu*, his name will mean "leaving a good reputation" (*Nguyễn Lưu Danh*). A recent trend, no doubt influenced by foreign practices, is to use the mother's family name as a middle name. This, however, is not very common.

Because names are used differently in American and Vietnamese societies, the Vietnamese will face a dilemma in answering the simple question, *What's your (last) name*? Should a Vietnamese whose name is *Nguyên Văn Hai* tell his American friends that his last (family) name is *Hai* or *Nguyễn*? If he says that his family name is *Hai*, he is not telling the truth because *Hai* is his given name. He is "right", however, in the sense that people will call him *Mr. Hai* as he has always been called by his fellow countrymen. But how can he explain that his father's family name is not *Hai* and his children's family name is not *Hai*, either? If he says that his family name is *Nguyễn* he is telling the truth, but he is not "right" because people will call him *Mr. Nguyễn* and not *Mr. Hai*, which is not the way he has been accustomed to. Moreover, his name will be rewritten *Hai Văn Nguyễn* which is as strange to him as the name of somebody unknown to him. The advantage in this case is that he will have the same name as his father's and his children's. In American names it is usually easy to distinguish the first from the last. John Smith and Smith John can only be the one and same person. This is not the case with Vietnamese names. *Hà Văn Mai* and *Mai Văn Hà* are two different persons. By *reversing* the order of the different parts of a Vietnamese name, we may change a person's name into another's completely unknown to him.

Vietnamese is a tone language and tones are represented in writing by various diacritic marks which are not used in English. In files written in English, different names like (*Nguyễn Văn*) *Tuyên, Tuyển, Tuyền, Tuyến*, etc... are usually written in the same way without any diacritic marks (*Tuyễn*) and, therefore, it is not possible to tell who is who. Confusion of identity and embarrassment may arise in this case. But Vietnamese are making efforts to learn new things and new ways of doing things in their new adoptive country, including the practice of reversing the order of components of their names, recognizing a friend's name written without diacritic marks and getting accustomed to being called by the family name.

A study of Vietnamese names would not be complete if we did not mention the way in which names are given to members of the former royal family. (The last King, Bảo Đại, abdicated in 1945 at the August Revolution to become citizen Nguyên Vĩnh Thụy.) The name of the royal family is *Nguyễn*. The founder of the dynasty is Nguyễn Phúc Ánh known as King Gia-Long. His successor, Minh-Mang, devised a way to give names to members of the royal family to distinguish them from the common people. Those who are not direct descendants of the King will be known as *Tôn-Thất* (for men) and *Tôn-Nữ* (for women), those who are will be given a name, taken from a poem[1] written by Minh-Mang himself, to reflect the generation to which they belong. The first word in this poem, which consists of four lines with five words each, will be the (middle) name of the first generation of Minh-Mang's descendants, the second will be the name of the second generation and so on. Minh-Mạng envisioned that the Nguyễn family would reign for at least twenty generations. Unfortunately, it could last only for five generations after Minh-Mạng. The name of King Bảo-Đại is (*Nguyễn Phúc*) *Vĩnh Thụy*. *Vĩnh* is the fifth word in the poem written by Minh-Mạng. The names taken from Minh-Mạng's poem are actually middle names but members of the royal family use them as if they were family names. They simply leave out the family name *Nguyễn*. For women, members of each generation also receive a special name to distinguish them from other generations such as *Công Tôn Nữ*, *Công Huyền Tôn Nữ*, *Công Tằng Tôn Nữ*, etc... This practice still goes on even though there is no longer a king in Vietnam.

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[1] Following is the above-mentioned poem by King Minh Mạng:

MIỆN HƯỞNG ƯNG BỬU VĨNH,
BẢO QUÍ ĐỊNH LONG TƯỞNG,
HIẾN NĂNG KHẠM KẾ THUẬT,
THẾ THOẠI QUỐC GIA XƯỞNG.

In Vietnam today, we could find some Vietnamese bearing *Định* as their middle name which represents the 8th generation from King Minh Mạng.

Chapter III

MAN IN RELATION TO OTHERS: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The family is the basic institution developed by the Vietnamese to perpetuate society and provide protection to the individual. Generally speaking, the Vietnamese family structure is more complex than that of the American family which is essentially nuclear in nature and which excludes relatives and in-laws. In the Vietnamese family structure roles are more numerous and more clearly defined than in its American counterpart.

Vietnamese people distinguish between the immediate family (*tiểu gia-đình*) and the extended family (*đại gia-đình*). The Vietnamese immediate family includes not only husband, wife and their unmarried children but also, most of the times, the husband's parents and the sons' wives and children. The extended family consists of the immediate family and close relatives sharing the same family name and ancestors who usually live in the same community.

The complexity of the Vietnamese concept of family is reflected in the rather complex terminology designating kinship. Each member of the extended family has a particular designation according to his relative position and his role in the family structure (Robert Spencer, 1945). In Vietnamese society, the father is the head of the family. However, unlike the father in traditional Chinese society, who is empowered, at least theoretically, with absolute rights over his children and wife (Chang-tu Hu, 1960 and A.F. Légendre, 1926), the Vietnamese father shares with his wife and children collective and bilateral responsibility, legally, morally, and spiritually. In the relationship between parents and children, as well as between husband and wife, the Vietnamese people retain much of their own custom and tradition, in spite of the great influence of Chinese culture and Confucian doctrine. In the eyes of her children the Vietnamese mother has the same status as the father. She is also the embodiment of love and the spirit of self-denial and sacrifice.

PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Vietnamese parents consider it a most important responsibility to train their children. By virtue of the principle of collective responsibility, the parents will bear the disgrace brought about by the activities of children who dishonor themselves in much the same way as they share the honor and fame of their virtuous and talented children.

At an early age, children are taught by their parents to behave according to the principle of filial piety and social courtesy. The family is the school where the child learns the respect rules both in behavior and in linguistic response. The cornerstone of children's behavior in the family is filial piety which consists in loving, respecting and obeying one's parents. Talking back or acting contrary to the wishes of one's parents is evidence of lack of filial piety. For the Vietnamese, the obligation to obey his parents does not end with his coming of age or his marriage. Filial piety also means solicitude and support to one's parents, chiefly in their old age. Vietnamese elderly people never live by themselves or in nursing homes but with one of their children, usually their eldest son.

This obligation is not discontinued by the parents' death. It survives in the form of ancestral cult and the maintenance of ancestral tombs. Ancestor worship is a family cult practised in most, if not all, Vietnamese homes, even in the homes of Vietnamese people living overseas. The child who lacks filial piety is rejected and ostracized by other members of the family and community. The worst insult which a Vietnamese can receive and by which he is mortally hurt is the expression "lack of filial piety" (*đồ bất hiếu*) applied to him.

SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

In Vietnamese culture, the relationship between siblings is determined by the principle of age priority which requires siblings to respect and obey older ones. The eldest brother is entrusted with a heavy responsibility, that of substituting for the parents in case of emergency. He is considered by his siblings as their leader. The principle of collective and bilateral responsibility underlies the relationship between members of the family at every level. Concord and love among siblings is a token of a happy and virtuous family.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS RELATIVES

As with members of the immediate family, members of the extended family are bound together by a strong sense of collective responsibility and mutual obligation. The notion of blood relationship is always present in the mind of the Vietnamese. In honor or in disgrace, members of the extended family will share the same fate as if they were members of the immediate family. They are expected to give one another moral and material assistance, especially in time of stress. On the social and political planes, this strong sense of loyalty to the extended family tends to encourage the spirit of sectarianism and nepotism.

The notion of family ties is imprinted in the mind of the Vietnamese thanks to strict rules of precedence. Respect and love are demanded of young people to members of parental generation and above. Uncles and aunts must be treated with respect as if they were one's own parents. Filial piety is the compulsory rule in relations from descendants to ascendants. Besides the consciousness of blood relationship and linguistic ties which express themselves in a very detailed kinship terminology, members of the Vietnamese extended family are closely bound by the common veneration of the dead. Ancestor worship is a hyphen between the dead and the living and a strong tie between members sharing the same ancestry. Through such rites as the cleaning of the ancestral tombs (*lễ tảo-mộ*) and celebration of ancestral death anniversaries (*ngày giỗ*) [2] which all members of the extended family are expected to attend, the ties which bind the Vietnamese to other members of his family are reinforced.

CONCLUSION

In the last three decades the Vietnamese family institution has been attacked on all fronts. The Western doctrine of individualism advocated the liberation of the individual from the encroachment of the family upon his personal freedom. Under the communist regime of North Vietnam, children were taught to spy on their own parents and report to the Party of any subversive talk or behavior. The war devastated the country side and brought people to the cities where narrow spaces are not suitable to the pattern of the extended family. Since 1975, with the communist takeover of the whole country and the tragic exodus of the Vietnamese people throughout the world to search for freedom, the Vietnamese family has become increasingly broken and dispersed. Husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters live thousands and thousands of miles apart. But despite of all this, deep family feelings and ties are still strong and the Vietnamese family concept still survives through time and change.

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[2] Vietnamese people do not generally celebrate their own birthdays or their parents' but do not fail to celebrate their parents', their ancestors', and their relatives' death anniversaries. For a discussion of ancestor worship in Vietnamese society, see Cadière (1958).

Chapter IV

MAN IN RELATION TO OTHERS: WIDER SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

RESPECT BEHAVIOR IN NON-FAMILY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The desire to achieve harmony between the self and the non-self still remains the essential preoccupation of the Vietnamese in interpersonal relations outside the family group. The basic principle underlying family relationship such as respect due to elders is extended to the relationship between members of wider social groups. The concept of society as an extension of the family is evidenced by the transposition into social usage of a language originally intended for domestic life. Vietnamese uses more than a score of kinship terms as personal pronouns. The choice of the appropriate word depends on the relative age, social status, and sex of the persons involved as well as the degree of acquaintance, respect, and affection between speakers and hearers who are not related to each other by blood or marriage (see Appendix 3).

In Vietnamese society, the predominant sentiment in the relation between members of a social group is respect. This is particularly true of attitude towards old people. Respect and consideration for old age no doubt derive from the obligation of filial piety which requires young people to respect and love their parents and older members of the family. They are also due to belief that a long life is a sign of kindness and regard on the part of God for virtuous people and that old people are the carriers of tradition and the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. Old people enjoy high respect in Vietnamese society, irrespective of wealth, position, and status. This respect is expressed both in attitude, behavior, and in the use of special terms of address and stylistic devices. Unlike Western societies which put a premium on youth, Vietnamese society is proud of its old members. Age constitutes an asset, not a liability.

Like old people, teachers—even though they are young—enjoy great respect and prestige in Vietnamese society. In Vietnam the student-teacher relationship retains much of the quality of a son's respect for his father's wisdom and of a father's concern for his son's welfare. The respect which students show to their teachers is also evidenced by linguistic data. The terms of address which students use in speaking to their teachers are those they use in speaking to their parents. Not only the students but the students' parents too, show special courtesy and respect to the teacher.

On the positive side, respect is often expressed in the form of courtesy, on the negative side, it consists in trying to spare others from the humiliation of losing face. Linguistic devices are one of the many ways which help the Vietnamese achieve this objective. Depreciatory terms are applied to oneself and complimentary terms used for others. Face is extremely important for the Vietnamese. Everybody is eager to save his face, the rich like the poor, those in high as well as in low social positions. This fear of losing face is explicable in an immobile society (horizontal immobility only). The individual who loses face will have to endure public ridicule and derision right in the midst of his community. Furthermore, the family would have to share any social disgrace incurred by the individual. So, one is very careful to avoid losing face and refrain from making others to lose face. The practice of beating about the bush to avoid a negative answer to a request and the tendency of the Vietnamese student to say *yes* to every question asked by his teacher stems from this preoccupation of "saving face".

Appendix 3

"YOU" AND "I" IN VIETNAMESE

One of the most important features of Vietnamese culture is the expression of respect paid to other people in society. In America, people put emphasis on friendliness in interpersonal relationships while in Vietnamese society the emphasis is more on respect. We may say without fear of error that respect is the cornerstone of interpersonal relationships in Vietnamese society, whether in the family or in social circles, whether on the employment scene or between friends and lovers. This is reflected in the language used by the Vietnamese in their daily life.

In making an utterance, the Vietnamese express at the same time with ideas and concepts, an attitude of respect (or disrespect) towards the interlocutor. This expression is so natural—because inherent in the nature of the words used—that generally both the speaker and the hearer do not pay any attention to and are not conscious of it. But, if the speaker unintentionally (or purposely) uses a word reflecting an attitude of disrespect, the hearer will instantly realize it and react to it accordingly.

American people use only one word—the word *yes*—to express agreement and this word doesn't reflect any attitude of respect or disrespect. Of course, an answer with the mere word *yes* lacks the courtesy conveyed by a long answer such as *Yes, I am*, *Yes, he did*, or *Yes, Mr. Brown.* On the contrary, the Vietnamese speaker must choose between *Dạ*, *Vâng*, *Phải*, *Ừ*... to express agreement. No well-bred Vietnamese would use *Ừ* as an answer in talking to his parents, older people, his teacher, his superior, or monks and priests. In Vietnamese, other people invite us to *xơi* (eat) *rice* (take a meal) but in replying, we must say that we have already or not yet *ăn* (eat) and not *xơi*. How complicated it is!

In a letter addressed to a person they don't know to ask for information, to apply for a job, or for whatever purpose, American people usually use the term *Dear* preceding the name (the last name, it should be noted) of the recipient to show courtesy and friendliness (non-hostility). Vietnamese people, by contrast, use only terms expressing respect such as *Kính*, *Kính thưa*... and never call the person by name, for this would convey an impolite, disrespectful attitude. Consequently *Dear Mr. Brown* is not *Ông Brown thân mến* but simply *Thưa Ông* or *Kính Ông.* Even the practice of calling the interlocutor by name or avoiding it reflects the psychological background of Vietnamese and American cultures (more emphasis on respect or on friendliness). In American society where almost nobody knows anybody else, even people living in the same apartment complex, mentioning the name (last name, that is) of the interlocutor shows that one is interested in and friendly with him, the evidence of which is to be found in the remembering of his name. Consequently, so as to show that they are courteous and friendly, American people usually mention the name of the interlocutor in their greetings (i.e. *Good morning, Mr. Brown* or *Good-bye, Miss Green* when speaking to people who are not close friends, and *Good morning, Bill* or *Good-bye, Susie* when speaking to friends).

In Vietnamese society, almost everybody knows the name of everybody else living in the same community. The neighbors (usually called "relatives in the neighborhood") are often considered as friends or relatives. In greeting, we often avoid mentioning the name of the interlocutors, especially those who are senior in age or status. We call them by name only when they are our close friends or junior in age or status, otherwise calling them by name is a sign of insolence and lack of manners.

In Vietnamese, when we want to show special respect to the interlocutors (persons such as parents, old people, teachers, monks and priests, superiors) we always start the sentence with a function-word expressing respect such as *Dạ*, *Thửa*, *Dạ thửa*, *Kính thửa*. Therefore the word *Dạ* in this context is but a function-word showing respect and does not show agreement.

Perhaps personal pronouns are a word class in Vietnamese which best reflects this preoccupation for expressing respect or disrespect for other people in language. American people use the only word *you* to address parents, brothers and sisters, wife and children, friends and foes, and even animals. Likewise, they use the only word *I* to refer to themselves when speaking to the above mentioned people. (Of course there is also the word *me*, but *me* is but an inflected form of *I*) How convenient it is! But at the same time those words lack the ability to express feelings of respect or disrespect of the Vietnamese personal pronouns.

When addressing people who are senior in age or status, we usually use such terms of respect as *Cụ*, *Ổng*, *Bác*, *Chú*, *Anh*, *Thầy*, *Cha*, *Bà*, *Cô*. When addressing people who are younger than ourselves or who have a lower status, we usually use such term as *Anh*, *Chị*, *Chú*, *Em*, *Cháu Con*. To show anger and despise, we use such discourteous terms as *Mày*, *Mi*... When fawning, we use such words as *Ngài*, *Cụ Lớn*.

By merely observing the use of the personal pronouns in Vietnamese, people can guess, to a certain extent, the personality and good manners of the speaker as well as the relationship between speaker and hearer with regard to feelings and respect. The use of these personal pronouns is a very delicate matter depending on the relative age, status, and degree of intimacy between speaker and hearer. Consequently, the use of personal pronouns is not invariable as in the case of English (always, *you*, *I*) but will change according to the intensity of respect (or disrespect) and love (or hatred) that exist between hearer and speaker. A man and a woman, at their first acquaintance, will call each other *Ông* and *Tôi* (or *Cô* and *Tôi*). But as the degree of intimacy reaches the level of love, the term *Ong* is replaced by *Anh* and the term *Tôi* will become *Em*. When love is lost, they will revert to the initial *Ông*, *Tôi*. In some cases where anger, hatred, and lack of self-control prevail, *ông* may become *Mày* and *Tôi* may become *Tao*. The terms *Anh/Em* and *Mày/Tao* are separated by a Great Wall of feelings and emotions.

Terms of address such as *Bác, Chú, Anh*, are perhaps the most difficult to use in Vietnamese because they can express opposite feelings and sentiments. According to contexts, they may express respect or disdain, familiarity or contempt. Perhaps they are much more difficult to use than the French words *tu/toi* which can express either intimacy or contempt. When we address a stranger *tu/toi*, the only feeling conveyed is obviously contempt. But a Vietnamese addressing a stranger as *Bác* may mean respect (considering him on the same footing as our father's elder brother), familiarity and affection (regarding him as his uncle), or outright contempt (looking down on him as having a low social status).

The expression of respect (or contempt) is inherent in the structure of Vietnamese. In using Vietnamese, we cannot overlook this essential feature of Vietnamese culture which is the expression of respect in language.

Chapter V

MAN IN RELATION TO OTHERS: LANGUAGE AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

LANGUAGE

Vietnamese is the national language of more than 56 million speakers in Vietnam and more than one million Vietnamese immigrants living overseas. It is not mutually intelligible with any other national languages spoken in Asia. Like the ethnic origin of the Vietnamese people, the genetic relationship of the Vietnamese language is still a matter of controversy. Vietnamese has been successively assigned to the Sino-Tibetan, Tai, Mon-Khmer, Malayo-Polynesian and Austro-Asiatic language families.

Vietnamese is diversified into three main dialects (Northern, Central, and Southern) which differ from one another both phonologically and lexically. These differences do not, however, prevent Vietnamese people from understanding one another although they can help identify the locality which the speaker of a dialect comes from. The situation is more comparable to English which has British, American, and Australian varieties than to Chinese which consists of mutually unintelligible dialects.

From the phonological point of view, Vietnamese is a monosyllabic and tonal language. In spite of its monosyllabism, which is recognized by the articulatory manner of the syllables in connected speech, Vietnamese has a sizeable number of words which are disyllabic and sometimes, polysyllabic. Unlike intonation, tones are pitch changes within a word which affect its lexical meaning. Tones are not uniform in the three main dialects of Vietnamese. While the Northern dialect has six tones, the Central and the Southern dialects have five tones only.

In some dialects, the number of tones is reduced to four. The same tone may have markedly different phonetic characteristics in the three main dialects.

The six tones in Vietnamese are:

-The level tone (*thanh không dấu*) in such words as *ma* (ghost), *la* (shout).

-The breathy rising tone (*thanh sắc*) in such words as *má* (cheek), *lá* (leaf).

-The breathy falling tone (*thanh huyền*) in such words as *mà* (but), *là* (to be).

-The falling-rising tone (*thanh hỏi*) in such words as *mả* (tomb), *lả* (exhausted).

-The creaky-rising tone (*thanh ngã*) in such words as *mã* (horse), *lã* (plain water).

-The low falling tone (*thanh nặng*) in such words as *mạ* (young rice plant), *lạ* (stranger).

Generally speaking, Vietnamese has thirty-five segmental phonemes which consist of vowels, semi-vowels, and consonants. The number and nature of these phonemes vary slightly from one dialect to another. The eleven *vowels* which exsist in almost all dialects of Vietnamese are:

- /i/ in *bi* (marbles)
- /e/ in *lê* (pear)
- /ε/ in *nghe* (hear)
- /a/ in *ba* (three)
- /u/ in *ngu* (stupid)
- /o/ in *khô* (dry)
- /ɔ/ in *to* (big)
- /ɯ/ in *thư* (letter)
- /ɤ/ in *mơ* (dream)
- /ɐ/ in *măng* (bamboo shoot)
- /ʌ/ in *dân* (people)

Consonants present less uniformity among the dialects than vowels. Certain consonants exist in one dialect as a separate phoneme but not in some others. They are twenty-six in number:

- /b/ with two allophones {b} in *ba* (three) and {p} in *thấp* (low)
- /t/ in *tối* (dark)
- /t'/ in *thôi* (cease)
- /d/ in *đôi* (a pair)
- /n/ in *nói* (speak)
- /ɲ/ in *nhà* (house)
- /ŋ/ in *ngà* (ivory)

- /ʈ/ in *tre* (bamboo)
  (in Central & Southern dialects only)
- /c/ in *cha* (father)
- /k/ in *ca* (sing)
- /k͡p/ in *học* (study)
- /g/ in *gan* (liver)
  (Northern dialect only)
- /m/ in *ma* (ghost)
- /j/ in *già* (old)
  (in Central and Southern dialects only)
- /x/ in *khô* (dry)
- /h/ in *ho* (cough)
- /y/ in *dài* (long)
  (in Central and Southern dialects only)
- /ŋ͡m/ in *lông* (hair)
- /f/ in *phai* (fade)
- /v/ in *voi* (elephant)
  (in Northern and Central dialects only)
- /s/ in *xa* (far)
- /z/ in *dê* (goat)
- /ʃ/ in *sao* (star)
  (not in Northern dialect)
- /ʒ/ in *ruồi* (flies)
  (not in Northern dialect)
- /ɭ/ in *la* (shout)
- /w/ in *hoa* (flower)

All vowels, except for /ɐ/ and /ʌ/, can occur initially, medially, or finally. They can also occur in clusters to form diphthongs and triphthongs. Vietnamese is rich in diphthongs and triphthongs. There are twenty five diphthongs, both of the closing and widening types, and seven triphthongs. All Vietnamese consonants (except the allophone {p}) occur in the initial position but few consonants occur in the final position. There are only ten final consonants in Vietnamese. They are: /p, t, k, c, k͡p, m, n, ŋ, ɲ, ŋ͡m/. In contrast with English, Vietnamese consonants do not occur in clusters, whether initially or finally.[3]

From the morphological point of view, Vietnamese is an isolating language. Unlike English, Vietnamese does not express grammatical categories by way of suffixes. When necessary, grammatical meaning is expressed by function words.

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[3] We are talking about consonant *sounds* and not consonant letters. In Vietnamese writing there are clusters of consonants such as "ch", "ph", "ng", "ngh", "tr", "th", etc... but these clusters represent *single* sounds (/c/ f/ ŋ/ ʈ/ t'/).

Therefore Vietnamese words remain invariable, whether they are singular or plural, masculine or feminine.

Example:

Một con ngựa: one horse.
Năm con ngựa: five horses

Tense is a necessary grammatical category in English in which the verb form expresses the contrast between past and present tenses. In Vietnamese the same verb form is used for present, past, and future actions, or for first, second, and third person.

Nó ăn cơm (He eats rice/ he ate rice)
Tôi ăn cơm (I eat rice/ I ate rice)

The form of a word in Vietnamese does not assign it to a definite part of speech. A word can be a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb, according to the position it occupies in the sentence and/or the words accompanying it.

Vietnamese relies almost entirely on syntax for expressing grammatical relationships and meaning. The two syntactic devices mainly used in Vietnamese are word-order and function-words. Since Vietnamese words are invariable, there are no inflection, concord, or agreement. Word-order is very important in Vietnamese. Generally, a sentence will completely change its meaning or become meaningless if we change the order of the words in that sentence. Because words are invariable, they can occupy almost any position in the sentence, bringing about change of meaning of the sentence in each position. The concepts of tense, aspect, voice, number, negation, interrogation, imperative, and exclamation are all expressed by function words.

The Vietnamese affirmative statement has pretty much the same word-order as its equivalent in English, that is "actor-action-recipient of action" of the type *dogs bite men*: *chó cắn người*. But unlike English, inversion of subject never occurs in a Vietnamese negative or interrogative sentence.

Vietnamese lexicon consists of a stratum of native words and a large number of words borrowed from foreign languages. The two main lexical devices popularly used in the coining of words with native linguistic materials are compounding and reduplication. A distinguishing characteristic of Vietnamese vocabulary is the existence of words having a general meaning from which compound words are created to denote more specific meaning. For example, from the general term *tu* which denotes a container of any size, material, shape or use, the compound words *tủ sách* (bookcase), *tủ áo* (closet), *tủ trà* (cupboard), *tủ hàng* (shop-window), *tủ sắt* (safe) *tủ lạnh* (refrigerator) are coined. Another distinctive feature of Vietnamese.vocabulary is the reduplication of morphemes, with or without phonological changes, to coin a new word expressing new denotation or connotation. *Xanh-xanh* (bluish), deriving from the morpheme *xanh* (blue) and *mờ-mịt* (vague, uncertain) deriving from the morpheme *mờ* (not clear) are examples of reduplication. Other devices of word creation such as shortening, blending, onomatopoeia and acronyms are not popular in Vietnamese.

Loan-words, loan-morphemes and loan translation are the main devices used in coining new words with materials borrowed from foreign languages. Almost all loan words in Vietnamese undergo phonological change and, to a certain extent, semantic change or restriction. Chinese and French are the two main sources of linguistic borrowing for Vietnamese. Following are a few examples of loan words, loan morphemes and loan translation:

xà-phòng (soap) directly borrowed from the French word *savon*

ốc-xy-hóa, a new creation from the French morpheme *oxygène* (oxygen) and the Chinese morpheme 化 (to become)

hộp-đêm (night club), a literal translation of the French word *boîte de nuit*.

WRITING

The writing system used by Vietnamese people nowadays is an alphabetic writing called *quốc-ngữ*. The Vietnamese alphabet was devised by European missionaries—French, Spanish and Portuguese in particular—in the 17th century for the purpose of translating the Bible into the vernacular. It became the national writing for the Vietnamese people in the second decade of this century. The Vietnamese writing system aims at representing the pronunciation of Vietnamese on the basis of "one grapheme per phoneme". The Vietnamese alphabet consists of twelve vowel letters, twenty-six consonants or groups of consonant letters and five tone marks (see Appendix 6).

The use of the alphabetic writing in Vietnam is of recent date. For centuries, both under the Chinese domination (111 B.C.-938 A.D.) and long after independence was reconquered from the Chinese, the Chinese writing system, called Chinese characters, remained the main writing used by the Vietnamese. Chinese characters, being the graphic representation of the Chinese language, were used only by those who learned Chinese. Consequently, this type of writing was restricted to the class of scholars and "educated people".

The need for a writing system which could represent the Vietnamese language led to the creation of *chữ nôm* or the demotic writing system. *Chữ nôm* aims at representing Vietnamese speech but still uses symbols borrowed from Chinese characters. This writing system is still more complicated than Chinese characters themselves because it endeavors to represent both pronunciation and meaning by separate constituent elements. The earliest record of *chữ nôm* now available is dated 1282. It is in this type of writing that most literary creations by Vietnamese authors in the Vietnamese language prior to the nineteen twenties had been recorded and transmitted to the present generation.

Attempts to use the Roman alphabet to represent Vietnamese started as early as the 17th century. Alexandre de Rhodes wrote the first Vietnamese dictionary published in Rome in 1651. During the two centuries that followed, the Vietnamese alphabetic writing system was restricted to a small circle of Christian clergy while the majority of "educated people" used *chữ nôm* and Chinese characters as a medium of written communication. The first printing press for *quốc ngữ* was installed in Vietnam in 1865 and not until after the first World War did *quốc ngữ* become the national writing system for Vietnam. Nowadays it is the only writing system used by Vietnamese people. Very few can read and write the demotic writing or Chinese characters.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

As in most cultures, non-verbal communication plays an important role in Vietnamese society, sometimes to accompany and reinforce linguistic symbols, sometimes as substitute for language.

In a previous chapter, it was pointed out that respect is the cornerstone of interpersonal relationships in Vietnamese society. Respect is conveyed by the use of special terms of address and certain stylistic devices. But respect is also expressed by non-verbal behavior. A Vietnamese student who sits quietly and listens attentively to the teacher wants to express respect to his teacher. This behavior has often been misinterpreted by the American teacher as a passive and non-responsive attitude on the part of the student. It is also out of respect to the teacher that the Vietnamese student avoids eye contact with the teacher when speaking or being spoken to. By American standards, a person acting in this way would appear suspicious, unreliable, or mischievous. In Vietnamese culture, however, looking into somebody's eyes, especially when this person is of a higher status (in age or in social or family hierarchy) or of a different sex, usually means a challenge or an expression of deep passion. The proper respect behavior is to avoid eye contact in talking to someone who is not an equal or of the same sex.

The smile, which is sometimes enigmatic to the American observer, is another non-verbal symbol conveying the feeling of respect in Vietnamese culture. It is used as an expression of apology for a minor offence—being tardy in class, for example—or an expression of embarrassment when one commits an innocent blunder. For the Vietnamese, the smile is a proper response in most situations in which verbal expression is not needed or not appropriate. It is used as a substitute for *I'm sorry, Thank you* or *Hi!* It is used instead of a ready *yes* to avoid appearing over-enthusiastic. The smile is also a proper response to scoldings or harsh words to show that one does not harbor any ill feelings toward the interlocutor or that one sincerely acknowledges the mistake or fault committed.

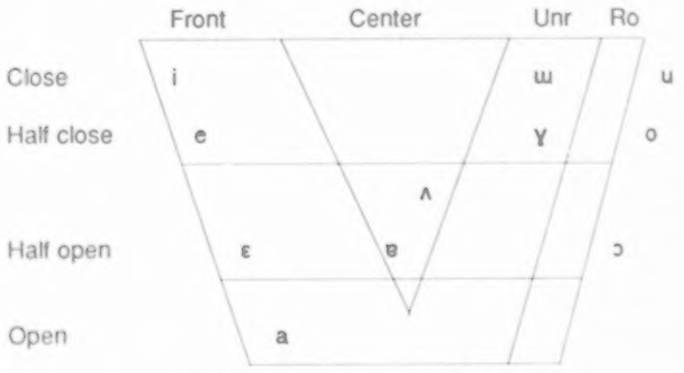
It should be noted that for certain feelings, Vietnamese culture prefers non-verbal communication while American culture is more inclined to use linguistic expression. For casual and informal circumstances, feelings of thankfulness or apology are not expressed by verbal expression such as *thank you* or *I'm sorry* but by non-verbal behavior (silence or a smile). Parents and teachers never say thanks to their children or students for a small service done, closing the window or passing the books around, for instance. A smile will do in this case. The person who gives a compliment never expects a *thank you* in return. In Vietnamese culture, a verbal expression of thanks in this case amounts to a lack of modesty from the person who receives the compliment. A smile or a blush in the face is the proper response to a compliment. If a verbal response is necessary, one would deny the compliment, saying that one does not deserve it. Because of the difference in the mediums used to express the feelings of appreciation or apology in the two cultures, misunderstandings have occurred.

Appendix 4

VIETNAMESE SEGMENTAL PHONEMES

(The Phonetic Symbols used in this book are IPA Symbols)

VOWELS


Front
Center
Unr
Ro
Close
Half close
Half open
Open
i
ɯ
u
e
ɤ
o
ʌ
ɛ
ɐ
ɔ
a

Unr = unrounded Ro = rounded

CONSONANTS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Stops Vls, unas	p		t		(ʈ)	c	k k͡p	
Vls, asp			t'					
Vcd	b		d				g	
Nasals	m		n			ɲ	ŋ ŋ͡m	
Spirants Vls		f		s	(ʃ)		x	h
Vcd		(v)		(z)	(ʒ)	j	{ɣ}	
Lateral				l				
Trill				{r}				
Semi-vowels	w					y		

Vls = voiceless   Vcd = voiced

Unas = unaspirated asp = aspirated

( ) = sounds not having phoneme status

{ } = sounds not existing in all the main dialects

KEY —points of articulation

1 = bilabial	2 = labio-dental	3 = dental
4 = alveolar	5 = retroflex or palato-alveolar	
6 = palatal	7 = velar	8 = glottal

Appendix 5

ENGLISH & VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE STRUCTURE DIFFERENCES

PHONOLOGY

ENGLISH	VIETNAMESE
Essentially a *polysyllabic* and *intonational* language	Essentially a *monosyllabic* and *tonal* language
Stress:	*Stress:*
- phonemic	- *not* phonemic
- may be used for contrastive purposes	-*not* used for contrastive purposes
Intonation:	*Intonation:*
- varied	- limited
- used to express different attitudes	- not used to express different attitudes
- may be used as a syntactic device	- not used as a syntactic device
Sounds:	*Sounds:*
Vowels:	*Vowels:*
- long and short vowels having phonemic contrasts	- *no* phonemic contrasts involving short and long vowels
- some vowels do not have equivalents in Vietnamese	- some vowels do not have equivalents in English
Consonants:	*Consonants:*
- all consonants except /h/ can occur in the final position	- only a very *limited* number of consonants can occur in the final position
- can occur in clusters	- cannot occur in clusters

- some consonants do not have equivalents in Vietnamese.	- some consonants do not have equivalents in English
Diphthongs:	*Diphthongs:*
- limited in number & of the falling type	- more diphthongs and triphthongs than English, having both falling *and rising* diphthongs

GRAMMAR

Morphology	*Morphology*
- of the *inflected* language group	- of the *isolating language group*
- *inflections* used to express grammatical categories (number, tense, mood etc.)	- words are *invariable*, markers are used to express grammatical meanings.
Syntax	*Syntax*
- Syntactic devices:	*- Syntactic devices:*
word order - function words - inflection - intonation	word order & function words *only*
- Word order:	*- Word order:*
modifiers usually *preceding* head	modifiers usually *following* head
- Negative sentence:	*- Negative sentence:*
use of negative marker and also of auxiliaries	use of negative markers only
- Interrogative sentence:	*- Interrogative sentence:*
use of inversion of subject but also of auxiliaries & intonation as question markers	use of function words as question mark *only*, no inversion or auxiliaries used

LEXICON

Areas of meaning: Usually different from those covered by words considered equivalents in Vietnamese	*Areas of meaning*: Usually different from those covered by words considered equivalent in English
Tendency to use *different* (unrelated) *words* for specific objects	Tendency to use a *general term* for a whole class of objects and compound-words deriving from *general term* for specific objects
Two-word verbs having meaning different from meanings of constituents (idioms)	Meaning of *two-word verbs* is meaning of constituents

Appendix 6

VIETNAMESE WRITING

Alphabet

a ă â b c ch d đ
e ê g gi gh h i k
kh l m n nh ng ngh o
ô ơ p ph qu r s t
th tr u ư v x y

Tones (marks over the "a")

	ma (ghost)	̉	mả (tomb)
́	má (cheek)	̃	mã (horse)
̀	mà (but)	̣	mạ (young rice plant)

A sample of writing

Chúng tôi tin rằng những điều sau đây là những sự thật hiển nhiên: mọi người sinh ra đều bình đẳng ,Tạo hoá phú cho họ những quyền bất khả xâm phạm trong những quyền đó có quyền sống, quyền tự do và quyền mưu cầu hạnh phúc.

(We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.)

Chapter VI

MAN IN RELATION TO OTHERS: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Before the Geneva Agreement.

Prior to the French conquest which took place in the latter half of the 19th century, Vietnam was a unified state under a hereditary King. Its political system was based—as it has been for centuries—on the principle of absolute monarchy in which the King was vested with limitless authority. All the executive, legislative and judiciary powers were in his own hands. The King presided over an elaborate bureaucracy of scholars—officials selected through competitive examinations. This system of recruiting public officials was instrumental in fostering vertical mobility in traditional Vietnamese society. Vietnamese history and literature are full of stories about farmhands and buffalo boys attaining outstanding public careers for which they become eligible after patient years of study. Unlike India, Vietnamese society had no discrete castes with hereditary privileges or disadvantages. The social system was a hierarchy of statuses based on relative age, learning, and public functions rather than a ranking of classes based on hereditary prerogatives, property, and income. There was the tradition of self-government on the level of the village which was the basic political unit of the nation. The village was governed by officials selected by its own people. It had its own customs and traditions. Local customs often showed themselves independent of national laws as evidenced by the proverb, *The King's laws yield before the customs of the village.*

When the French took control of Indochina, they retained much of the traditional system, superimposing upon it their own colonial administration. Vietnam was divided into three separate entities: the Southern part, re-named Cochinchina, was a colony directly governed by French administrators under French laws; the Northern part, called Tonkin, and the central part, called Annam, were protectorates. However, the limited authority of the Vietnamese royal government was confined to the central part of Vietnam only. In both protectorates the real power was in the hands of French administrators and bureaucracy. Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Laos, and Cambodia formed the Union of French Indochina under a governor-general appointed by the Ministry of Colonies in Paris.

In March 1945, the Japanese army of occupation in Indochina disarmed the French and put an end to the French domination. Emperor Bảo Đại, with Japanese support, proclaimed Vietnam's independence and established a national government which did not have any real power. The real master of the country was still the Japanese. In August 1945, after the defeat of Japan by the Allies, Emperor Bảo Đại abdicated in favor of the Vietnam Independence Front (called Việt-Minh), a popular movement for independence in which the Communists– under the guise of nationalists– played a predominant role. On September 2, 1945, Vietnam was proclaimed an independent and democratic republic. A Government was set up with Hồ Chi Minh as president. Soon a constitution was adopted in 1946 proclaiming the principles of democracy and civil rights. But once they were in power, the communists in the Việt-minh Front began a systematic "liquidation" of all the nationalist leaders and those who opposed their plan to turn Vietnam into a Communist state. The regime was the most authoritarian that had ever existed in Vietnam. No divergence from the official policy of the Việt-Minh was tolerated, let alone political opposition.

With the help of the British and Chinese troops which had been entrusted by the Allies to disarm the defeated Japanese troops, the French returned to Indochina in September 1945 and attempted to re-establish their domination over their former colonies. But the French met with a fierce resistance from the Vietnamese people. The French succeeded in controlling a number of large cities and towns all over Vietnam but the Viet-Minh forces controlled large areas of the Mekong delta in the South, more than half of the rural countryside outside of Hanoi in the North, and the most of the Central highlands and scattered areas of the Central lowlands.

To counteract the Việt-Minh government, the French established the State of Vietnam in 1949 with Bảo Đại as Chief of State. The real power, nevertheless, was still entirely in the hands of the French. After nine years of indecisive war, the French finally signed the Geneva Agreement to end the hostilities and withdrew their expeditionary troops from Indochina.

Since the Geneva Agreement

The Geneva Agreement, signed on July 20, 1954, partitioned Vietnam along the 17th parallel and created two Vietnams: North Vietnam under the communist rule led by Hồ Chi

Minh and South Vietnam under a non-communist government led by Bảo-Đại as Chief of State.

On October 26,1955, Ngô Đình Diệm, who had been appointed by Bảo-Đại as Prime-Minister, declared South Vietnam to be a republic under his presidency. Bảo-Đại was thrown out of the political arena. A constitution was promulgated the following year. It provided for separation of executive and legislative powers but the relative strength of the two branches was markedly uneven. There was no separate autonomous judicial branch and the court system was under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice. The President was elected by direct ballot for a five-year term. The legislative, known as the National Assembly, was unicameral and composed of deputies elected by direct suffrage.

The constitution existed only on paper. The entire government system was controlled by the office of the Presidency, in particular by Ngô-Đình Nhu who was Diệm's brother and advisor. The Ngô brothers ruled the country with iron hands, their powers extended directly to the provinces, districts, and even the villages. A presidential decree provided for the appointment of village councilors by the province chief, injecting government control into the traditionally self-governing village. The regime became more and more repressive and the whole government system became the personal concern of the Ngô family.

On November 1, 1963, the Diệm regime was overthrown by a military uprising in the course of which Diệm and his brother were killed. With the death of Diệm, the civilian system of government in South Vietnam also came to an end. The country was ruled by a military junta which was torn by internal strife for power and which assumed different names under different leaders such as Military Revolutionary Council and Congress of Armed Forces. The period 1963-1967 was a most confused period with successive coups and counter-coups led by different factions of the military. Finally Nguyễn Văn Thiệu (a major-general) and Nguyễn Cao Kỳ (vice air marshall) emerged as victors in this struggle for power. To placate popular opposition against a militarist regime, Thiệu had a constitution drafted and adopted on April 1, 1967. It provided for a separation of powers and an independent judiciary. The respect for basic human rights was confirmed. The President and Vice President were elected by direct ballot for a 4-year term. A Prime-Minister assisted the President in his executive job. There was a bicameral legislature directly elected by the people. Soon after the adoption of the constitution an election was organized, and as was expected in any authoritarian regime, Thiệu and Kỳ were elected President and Vice-President for a four-year term. But Kỳ was discarded from the ruling team as soon as the first term was over. Thiệu, in a one-candidate election, was re-elected President for a second term. He managed to have the constitution amended so as he could run for a third term. But the Communists did not let him have his own way. South Vietnam fell before his second term came to an end. As with the Constitution of 1956, the Constitution of April 1967 existed only on paper. Civil Rights, separation of powers, democratic process, people's sovereignty, all these big words often repeated by the government were but words devoid of any real substance. All the powers belonged to a group of the military—whether in uniform or not—as they had belonged to a family of civilians under the previous regime.

North Vietnam was ruled by the Communist party which took power in 1945. From 1945 to 1950 the Communists still acted under the guise of nationalists fighting for "independence and democracy". The Vietnamese Communist party was even "dissolved" and took shape of a "Society for the Study of Marxism". Later, it became the Vietnamese Workers' Party. But in 1950, the Communists shed their nationalist clothes and openly advocated a "Socialist" regime for Vietnam, although the Constitution of 1946 was still considered as the guiding principle of their administration. On paper the people of both North and South Vietnam enjoyed all the formal manifestations of a democracy. Constitutions proclaiming basic human rights and democratic process were adopted. People went to the polls to elect representative officials to rule the country. But in both parts of the country the voters had to elect the candidates previously screened and selected by the government. Elections were but a means to lend a legitimate and democratic facade to an authoritarian regime. There was a great difference, however, between the two regimes. In the South, the citizen could enjoy ownership and "negative" freedom. If he did not overtly criticize or oppose the ruling power he could live his own life without being too much bothered by the government. In the North, the rulers exerted a very tight control over the citizens who were constantly spied upon by political cadres and even by their own folks. Ownership was a crime and criticism of government policy was equated with treason. People were persecuted because they belonged to certain social strata such as intellectuals, property owners and the loosely defined class of "small bourgeois". People were constantly forced to "study" the political lines of the government and to praise the "great achievements of the Party and President Hồ. With the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, the two parts of the country were re-unified under communist rule. The government overtly recognizes themselves as communists—a term which they had avoided for years—and advocated the building-up of Communism in Vietnam. A systematic program of Communist indoctrination of the South was carried out with "reeducation camps", "new economic zones", and "political study centers". People were persecuted because they had worked for the non-communist regime in South Vietnam or even because they did not enthusiastically support the new regime. It is easy to understand why hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled the country on the eve of the fall of Saigon and sought asylum in the non-communist world and why they have been fleeing the Communist regime, often at the risk of their lives, since South Vietnam was taken over by the communists.

ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Vietnam is essentially an agricultural country. Ninety percent of the population depend on the produce of the soil for their livelihood. Productivity and per capita income are generally low, even by Asian standards.

Rice is the staple crop and the basic diet of the Vietnamese. The areas of cultivation are distributed throughout the length and breadth of the country. Generations of farmers have, through the ages, gradually won land from marshes and forests. The two areas where rice production is most important are the Red River Delta in the North and the Mekong Delta in the South. The Red River Delta is also the area with a highest density in the country (from 1,000 to 2,000 to the square mile).

Before the Communist take-over, agriculture was practiced in the traditional manner. Units were small and individually operated by members of the family. With a few exceptions, methods of farming had not changed much over the centuries. They largely depended on the power of the peasants' muscles and those of animals such as the water buffaloes and cows.

Under the French rule, the production of rice was high enough to feed the people and to export. Rice and rubber were on the top list of products exported by Vietnam. But with the war which started in 1946, rice exports dwindled and finally ceased in 1965. In addition to rice, people grew manioc, beans, sweet potatoes, vegetables and fruit trees, mostly for internal consumption.

Fishing was also an important occupation along the entire coastline. Many edible species of deep-sea fish were known. Rivers and canals also supplied a considerable amount of fish.

A product deriving from fish is *nước mắm* (fish sauce) which constitutes an important element in the diet of the Vietnamese. French policy was guided by two major principles : the exploitation of those natural resources which provided raw materials for France and the reservation of the Indochinese domestic market for French manufactured goods. This resulted in the lack of industrial development in Vietnam. When the French left Indochina, the industry in existence consisted of light manufacturing and processing of local agricultural and forest products. Most industrial plants were concentrated in North Vietnam while the South was more concerned with agriculture. The few industrial plants that existed in South Vietnam were for the processing of agricultural products.

LEISURE AND HOLIDAYS

The Vietnamese is a hard working man but he believes that one should pause from time to time so as to relax and increase one's efficiency. The greatest opportunity for entertainment for all Vietnamese is, no doubt, the Tết Festival which is celebrated on the first day of the first month of the lunar year. The Vietnamese New Year's Day is celebrated for several days. On this special occasion food and drink are prepared for the family and guests. There is no poor man or family who would not make great sacrifice to live up to the special holiday of the year. Tết is a national non-religious holiday in which every one participates, the rich like the poor, the old like the young. Not only are the living but also the dead remembered on this festival. Everybody looks forward to this festival with mingled sentiments of joy, enthusiasm and apprehension, because of the expenses involved (see Appendix 7).

Another holiday which is commonly celebrated by Vietnamese of all walks of life and all over the country is Trung Thu or the Mid-Autumn Festival which is held on the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar. This is the occasion for grown-ups to enjoy the beauty of the full moon while eating moon-shaped cakes and drinking tea, and for children to enjoy lion dances and paper lanterns. According to popular belief and legends, the moon is the dwelling place of a fairy of great beauty called Hằng Nga. The moon is also a favorite theme of Vietnamese literature.

Besides these two festivals which are celebrated by everybody in Vietnam and which have no specific religious connotations, there are also holidays related to specific religions and celebrated only by specific religious groups. Christians celebrate Christmas to honor the birth of Jesus Christ. A number of non-Christians would also join in the celebration of Christmas, especially Western-educated Vietnamese. Buddhists celebrate the birthday of Buddha on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar, the date of the enlightenment of Buddha on the 8th day of the 12th month of the lunar calendar, and the Vu-Lan Day (All Soul's Day) on the 15th day of the 7th month to offer prayers for the redemption of the sins committed by the deceased parents and wandering souls. This is especially a holiday dedicated to the virtue of filial piety.

Holidays dedicated to national heroes, such as Hùng Vửớng, the founder of the Vietnamese nation, the Trửng Sisters, general Trần Hưng Đạo, Emperor Lê Lợi and Emperor Quang-Trung who all were remembered because they had defeated the invading Chinese troops at different periods of history, are but commemorative and patriotic days and not festivals for the entertainment of the Vietnamese people.

Appendix 7

TẾT. THE VIETNAMESE NEW YEAR FESTIVAL

Although the first of January is a legal holiday in Vietnam, the Vietnamese celebrate their New Year's day on another date—on the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar which varies from year to year between January 19 and February 20. Unlike the first of January which is observed as a holiday by government offices, banks and schools, and celebrated as the Western New Year's day by a few people in urban centers, Têt or the Vietnamese New Year's day is a national holiday celebrated by everyone and all over the country for several days on end. It is not only a holiday, it is also a festival time in which people stop working and enjoy themselves with good food, wine, and merry-making. The date of occurrence of Tết is based on the lunar calendar which is used together with the solar calendar by Vietnamese people. Official dates, transactions and documents are based on the solar calendar but anniversaries of death, traditional and religious celebrations are based on the lunar calendar. The lunar year (on earth, that is!) consists of twelve months having each twenty-nine or thirty days. To catch up with the solar calendar, every four years there is a leap year which consists of thirteen months. Because of the discrepancy between the lunar and the solar calendars, Tết does not fall on the same date in the solar calendar.

Tết is no doubt the most important holiday for the Vietnamese and, for a number of them, especially those living in rural areas, the only holiday in which they can afford to stop all work and indulge in feasting and merry-making for several days. Tết is celebrated to welcome the New Year which is hoped and believed to bring about a new and happy chapter in the life of everyone. It is the celebration of the return of Spring considered as the time of rebirth of nature. It is the time of gathering for members of the family who had to go away from home for work during the year. It is also the time for everybody to "celebrate" his birthday for everyone becomes one year older on New Year's day. A Vietnamese newborn is one year old until the last day of the 12th month of the (lunar) year. He becomes two years old on the first day of the first month of the following year, that is on Tết, even if he was born on the last day of the previous year. In general, a Vietnamese does not celebrate his birthday, except the first one which is, of course, celebrated by his parents because he is too young to celebrate everything[4]. Only a small number of young people belonging to wealthy families who have adopted Western habits and customs celebrate birthdays beyond the first one. Officially Têt is celebrated for three days, but it usually lasts for more than ten days. One week before Tết, sometimes much earlier, people start preparations for the great holiday. Houses are white-washed and repainted, furniture and metal utensils are polished, the living room is decorated with flowers to give the home an appearance of newness to match with the renewal in nature. New clothes are made for everybody in the family. For poor people, it may be the only time of the year when they can afford new clothes. A great amount of food is bought for the festive occasion, not only for members of the family but also for guests, relatives, friends, and neighbors who are expected to come for a visit during the holiday.

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[4] If he is a well-to-do person or a high-ranking official, he will likely celebrate his birthday again when he reaches the age of forty or fifty and he will do so only once every ten years (that is at the age of 60, 70, etc.) as an expression of thankfulness to Heaven for his longevity. Usually his children will bear all the expenses and take care of the celebration to show their love and gratitude to him.

Tết is the occasion for giving and receiving gifts. Before Tết, usually during the week preceding the New Year, gifts will be offered to one's relatives, close friends, bosses and all those to whom one feels some debt of gratitude for favors or help received during the year. It is the practice that wealthy people will offer presents to their relatives who are less fortunate. Gifts will be presented to in-laws, especially in-laws to be.

Tết is also the occasion for members of the family to gather together under the same roof, not only members who are still alive but also members who are dead. It is a popular belief that the spirit of deceased members of the family will come back from the beyond to spend the Tết festival with those still alive. On the eve of the New Year's Day people will make the rite of food offering before the ancestor's altar to "invite" the spirits of the dead to come home and spend Têt with the family. Even those who do not believe in the existence of the spirit after death still perform the ceremony as it is an occasion for them and their families to remember those beloved persons who have departed.

At midnight of the last day of the (lunar) year, people celebrate Giao Thừa—the transition moment—to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one. Firecrackers are exploded in abundance as an expression of joy and happiness and, for those who are superstitious, to chase away the evil spirits from their homes. Believers will go to the temples to offer prayers to Buddha or other deities and beg for heavenly blessings for themselves and their families. In North Vietnam, there is the custom of picking up burgeoning branches from the temple gardens (*hái lộc*) and bringing them home as a symbol of luck and prosperity. The first day of Tết begins with a ritual offering of food made to the ancestors. (This ceremony is renewed on the second and third days. At dusk of the third day another ceremony is performed to bid farewell to the spirits of the ancestors believed to return to the beyond.) After the ceremony, the children will present New Year wishes to their parents (and their grandparents, if they live under the same roof) who will compliment them for being one year older and give them money, usually wrapped in a red envelope, for them to spend during the holiday. Young children also expect money given them by their older brothers and sisters, their relatives and close friends of their parents. After the New Year breakfast, grown-ups, often accompanied by their children, begin the round of house calls to relatives, in-laws, bosses, friends and neighbors to wish them "health, wealth, longevity and happiness". Everywhere they go they are offered something to eat and drink and they are expected to accept what is offered them. Depending on the number of relatives and friends one has, these duty calls may go on for the whole holiday period. As the first day of Tết has a special significance, it is usually reserved for duty calls paid to parents, parents in-law, relatives of the parent's generation and people for whom one has special respect or affection.

The first visitor who comes to one's house is believed to foreshadow the turn of events that is to occur to one's family in the next twelve months. Therefore, people in mourning will avoid making house calls to relatives and friends, at least on the first day of Tết. In the old days, people even carefully chose the person to make the "first footing" to their house (*đạp đất*) so as to have a year full of good luck and blessing. Of course, the person chosen is someone having a good character, a smiling appearance, a wealthy life, and, if possible, a high social position. People also carefully chose the most auspicious time and direction, according to their horoscope, to get out of their house (xuất hành) on the first day of Tết. Nowadays very few people take the trouble to select the "first footer" to their house or to choose the most auspicious time for their "first outing".

As Tết is believed to be the beginning of a new and happy chapter of his life, everybody will get into a happy mood full of hope, friendliness and good will for other people. Everyday worries will be put aside, mistakes in the past forgotten, wrongs suffered in the old year forgiven. Every effort is made to check one's words and action to avoid coarse language or unbecoming behavior. People do not simply make resolutions to be nice and good, they implement their resolution in words and action during the New Year's days with the belief that this will continue for the whole year.

During the holiday most shops and stores are closed for at least three days and some may be closed for a whole week, except movie houses, theaters, and other places of entertainment which are crowded to the full. People in their newest and best garments stroll leisurely in the streets or converge on places of public entertainment. The festive and colorful atmosphere is enlivened by the exploding noise of firecrakers.

There are certain things which are always associated with Tết and have become the symbols of this Vietnamese holiday. In North

Vietnam, the pink peach blossom (*hoa đào*) adorns almost every house during the New Year festival. Even the poorest man will manage to buy a small branch of peach blossom to "welcome Spring". In Central and South Vietnam it is the yellow apricot blossom (*hoa mai*) which adorns almost every house during the Tết holiday. White apricot blossom, chrysanthemum, dahlia and narcissus are also popular but to a much lesser extent than pink peach blossom and the yellow apricot blossom now thought of as the flowers of Tết and Spring.

Red is the favorite color for it symbolizes good luck and happiness. Most houses are adorned with New Year wishes written on red paper hanging on the walls of the living room and above the front door. In the traditional manner, those words are written in Chinese characters[5] which few people could read. There is also the custom of decorating the house with parallel sentences (*câu đối*) which usually express New Year wishes or depict the pleasures brought about by Tết and Spring. These parallel sentences are written in Chinese characters or in Vietnamese demotic script (*chữ nôm*).

Although various kinds of foods are prepared for the festive season the most typical Têt food is, no doubt, the glutinous rice cakes (*bánh chưng* and *bánh tét*) meat rolls and candied fruits (*mứt*). Beside perfumed tea, wine and rice liquor are common beverages for the occasion.

During the Tết festival people engage in various forms of entertainment. Games are played in family circles as well as in public places. These include special games of dice, cards, literary riddles, movies and theater in town, wrestling, races, buffalo fights, and cock fights in the countryside. Gambling, now illegal, was tolerated during the Tết festival. For old people, going to the traditional theater is one way to find out, from the fate of the main character and the plot of the play, omens of things that would happen to them in the next twelve months.

Nowadays, certain customs and practices related to Tết have fallen into disuse. Few people, if any, will plant a bamboo pole (*cây nêu*) or paint, in lime, a bow and arrow in front of their houses during Tết. Ritual ceremonies offered to the kitchen gods with burning of votive papers, on the day they are supposed to go to Heaven, (the 23rd day of the 12th month) are on the decline. But the meaning of Tết remains unchanged for centuries. It is the time of the year for relaxation, entertainment, family gatherings, expressions of good will, and hope for the future. For Vietnamese living overseas, whether by choice or by force of circumstances, Tết has an added meaning: nostalgia. More than any other time of the year, Tết is the time when their thoughts are instinctively transported to their native country, town, and village where their parents, relatives and friends still live and where their beloved ancestors lie buried, to all those places and people that give a real significance to the Vietnamese New Years's festival.

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[5] The writing system now in use in Vietnam (*chữ quốc ngữ*) is based on the Roman alphabet.It was devised in the 17th century by European missionaries but did not become officially adopted until the beginning of this century.

Tết plays an important part in Vietnamese literature as it does in the life of the Vietnamese people. It has been one of the major themes of Vietnamese poetry through the ages. As Vietnamese people celebrate Tết every year, literary works on Tết are produced annually when the New Year's Day is around. Every year, newspapers and magazines publish special issues devoted specially to Tết with poems, short stories, essays, and plays glorifying the New Year holiday and Spring. In the old days, scholars and literary-minded people used to "inaugurate their pens" (*khai-bút*) on the morning of the first day of Tết with a poem or, at least a couplet in the form of parallel sentences dealing with some aspect of Tết and Spring. Parallel sentences are a favorite literary form for Vietnamese people to express feelings and emotions on various occasions, in moments of joy and happiness (as presents for wedding, or longevity celebrations) as well as in hours of sorrow and mourning (as condolences at funerals). They are used to depict religious feelings (as decorations in temples and communal worship houses) as much as to release frustration and anger (as sarcasm directed at enemies). It is customary to have parallel sentences written on red paper to decorate the house during the New Year holiday but for other occasions they are painted on lacquered wood, on glass, or embroidered on silk and velvet. Parallel sentences are usually written in Chinese characters or Vietnamese demotic script[6] and, recently, in Vietnamese alphabet but arranged in such a way that the words look somewhat similar to Chinese characters.

For Tết, parallel sentences usually depict the delights brought about by the holiday, such as:

As Spring comes, peach and apricot trees bring forth their new colorful
appearance;
When guests arrive in our house, tea and wine remain the traditional
enjoyment of leisure time.

Xuân đáo đào mai tân cảnh sắc;
Khách lai trà tửu cựu phong lưu.

They may express New Year wishes, sometimes with a touch of humor as in the following:

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[6] The Vietnamese demotic script (*chữ-nôm*) is a type of writing based on Chinese characters to represent the Vietnamese language. It is different from Chinese characters proper which are used to represent the Chinese language. Today very few Vietnamese could read and write the demotic script or Chinese characters.

In the evening of the last day of the year with worries for debts obsessing the mind, the wish is that the holiday occur only once in every ten years;
But in the morning of the first day of Tết with so much food and wine around the house, then the wish is that three days of festivity be extended to ten.

Chiều ba mươi nợ rối canh tàn, ước những mười năm dồn lại một;
Sáng mồng một rượu chè tràn quý tị, trông cho ba bữa hóa ra mười.

Although the custom of decorating the house with parallel sentences written on red paper has been declining, parallel sentences as a form of literary creation still remain active.

For centuries, Tết has provided a main source of inspiration for Vietnamese poets. Tết is the time for everybody to make New Year wishes and Trần-Tế-Xương, a 19th century poet, made the following wish which seems as appropriate nowadays as it was a century ago:

In imitation of others, I'll extend my New Year wishes;
Mine will be that everyone on earth
Kings, high officials, scholars, common people in every country
Become men and women worthy of the name.

Bắt chước ai ta chúc mấy lời,
Chúc cho khắp hết cả trong đời,
Vua, quan, sĩ, thứ người muôn nước
Sao được cho ra cái giống người.

Têt poems cover the whole gamut of feelings, from the happy mood of a man enjoying the delights of Tết and Spring to the pangs and agonies of a man or woman betrayed by the one who has promised love and fidelity, pangs and agonies rendered more acute by the atmosphere of festivity and happiness brought about by the New Year holiday. A deep sense of nostalgia for people and things of the past is skillfully evoked in the following lines by a modern poet, Vũ Đình Liên:

Every year, when peach and apricot trees brought forth their blossom,
The old scholar would be seen
Displaying red paper and China ink
On the sidewalks where busy crowds passed by.

Many a people who came to hire him write parallel sentences
Praised him for his calligraphy art in these words:

"The strokes of pen drawn by his skillful hands
Are as gracious as phoenixes and dragons dancing and flying."

But people who came to hire him grew fewer and fewer every year,
Where were now all those people who had come for his skills?
The red paper did not bother to keep its color gorgeous
And the ink became coagulated in the sorrowful ink slab.

The old scholar was still sitting there.
Passers-by now ignored him.
Yellow leaves fell on the red paper
And the drizzle fell over the town.

This year the peach trees bring forth their blossoms again
But the old scholar is nowhere to be seen.
Where are now the souls of those
Who lived long ago in bygone days?

Mỗi năm..hoa đào nở
Lại thấy ông đồ già
Đem mực tàu giấy đỏ
Bên phố đông người qua

Bao nhiêu người thuê viết
Tấm tắc ngợi khen tài
Hoa tay thảo những nét
Như phượng múa rồng bay

Nhưng mỗi năm mỗi vắng
Người thuê viết nay đâu ?
Giấy đỏ không buồn thắm
Mực đọng trong nghiên sầu

Ông đồ vẫn ngồi đấy
Qua đường không ai hay
Lá vàng rơi trên giấy
Ngoài trời mưa bụi bay

Năm nay đào lại nở
Không thấy ông đồ xưa
Những người muôn năm cũ
Hồn ở đâu bây giờ ?

In general, Tết is the time for joy and hope. But for a broken heart it is merely an occasion for dejection and gloomy brooding as witnessed by the following lines by another modern poet, Nguyễn Bính:

Huyền-Trân, my beloved Huyền-Trân, Spring has come!
All the flowers on earth are now blooming
But my heart alone remains closed with sorrow.

Huyền-Tràn ơi, Huyền-Trân ơi, mùa xuân rồi!
Giờ đây chín vạn hoa trời nở
Duy có lòng ta khép lại thôi.

Tết has also been a main source of inspiration for anonymous authors of folk lyrics and folk tales. Frequent references are made to Tết and Spring in the folk lyrics which are sung by rural youth during the New Year festival. Vietnamese children are delighted to hear folk tales on things related to Tết, such as the glutinous rice cakes, peach blossoms, or the bamboo pole. As long as Tết is still celebrated, it will remain a favorite theme for Vietnamese poets and writers.

Chapter VII

MAN IN RELATION TO NATURE

For the Vietnamese, nature does not merely afford a material background against which man lives and earns his livelihood. She also takes part in the affective and spiritual world of man. There are emotional ties between the Vietnamese and his natural environment.

Nature is not viewed as indifferent and soulless. She seems to share man's feelings and emotions. The Vietnamese common man often perceives in nature the reflection of his own joy and sadness. On the other hand, everything in nature has an impact on him. A change in the weather or the sight of the sunshine on the trees may arouse in him certain feelings and emotions. This is because the life of the Vietnamese greatly depends on nature, much more than the Western man. Whether the rain falls or the sun shines, the Vietnamese man turns his thoughts to the effects which those natural phenomena may exert on his crop in the field.

Out of his direct experience and observations, the Vietnamese common man has gained knowledge on nature and natural phenomena. He uses this knowledge, which is often expressed in proverbs and folk songs, to guide himself in weather prediction, in agricultural works, and in the control of natural calamities. By observing the sky, the clouds, the moon, the stars, rainbows, domestic animals, birds and insects, he can predict weather changes. This knowledge helps him adjust to the environment and in his process of making a living.

Living amidst nature the Vietnamese continually has to test his intelligence and strength against natural forces. Sometimes he is successful but other times he is overcome by destructive forces of nature. Drought, floods and typhoons often render useless his continuous efforts, and the consequences of those natural calamities are often famine and starvation. Perhaps the feeling of helplessness and constant fear have inspired the Vietnamese to consider natural catastrophes as provoked by supernatural forces and led him to deify nature.

But the spiritual communion between man and nature is not based only on mingled feelings of awe and fear and colored with mysticism and superstition. Nature also appears to the Vietnamese as invested with beauty and poetry. Moon and stars, clouds and sky, mountains and rivers, plants and flowers, everything in nature (with the exception of destructive elemental forces) awakens in man intense joy and deep affection.

Among the celestial bodies, the moon has a special attraction for the Vietnamese and occupies a special place in his heart. The moon is often a companion of the Vietnamese common man in his work in the rice fields as well as in his moments of leisure. Like the Chinese, the Vietnamese people used to set up their calendar according to the movements of the moon around the earth. Even today, when the Western calendar is used throughout the country in official business, some important holidays and festivals are still based on the lunar calendar. Among these are the Tết festival, the Mid-Autumn festival, and the anniversaries of the dead. The moon is also one of the most popular subject-matters of Vietnamese poetry and folk tales. Of course, it is the mystical and poetical aspects of the moon that the Vietnamese are interested in, not the matter-of-fact and scientific aspects of the earth's natural satellite. In the Vietnamese language the moon has become the symbol of femininity and beauty. The metaphor "Fairy of the Moon" (*Hằng-Nga*) refers to a beautiful woman.

Animals are part of the daily world of the Vietnamese common man and share life with him in a direct way. They keep him company, help him with his labor, or remind him of the passing of time. They are a source of economic prosperity and form part of his subsistence. In his close contact with the natural world, the Vietnamese man comes to perceive in the animals their characteristics, their habits, and their friendly or hostile inclinations. This sense of observation is part of his equipment for a successful adaptation to the environment.

The characteristics of animals, true or supposed, are commonly used for comparisons and allusions about man himself. The water buffalo, which enjoys great esteem and love from the Vietnamese peasant, represents patience, strength and endurance, qualities that are characteristic of the Vietnamese rural people. The cat usually stands for hypocrisy and treachery and the fox for wile and craftiness. Unlike Americans who consider the owl as the symbol of wisdom, the Vietnamese believe that the owl is the messenger of death, a bird of ill omen and a symbol of evil and ugliness. Toads and frogs stand for narrow-minded and ignorant people while the butterfly is a metaphor for a flighty and inconsistent lover. Animals are also given human feeling and emotions. They are thought to have retained much of the innocence and goodness lost in man. The general attitude is one of acceptance and sympathy for the animals.

Plants, trees, and flowers also form part of the natural environment of the Vietnamese who perceive in them not only the utilitarian aspect but also the esthetic and emotional facets. The Vietnamese common man is very fond of flowers. He has a marked preference for flowers with fragrance. The flower has become a symbol of beauty and femininity. The color and shape of the petals stand for women's physical beauty and the fragrance of the pollen is the symbol of women's virtue. This love for flowers is reflected in the custom of naming girls after the names of beautiful and fragrant flowers.

Nature in its manifold aspects has a great appeal to the heart, the mind, and the senses of the Vietnamese. In spite of the awareness of the dangers caused by destructive elemental forces, nature is viewed with love and sensitivity. This attitude seems to be the result of a successful adaptation of the Vietnamese to the natural environment.

Chapter VIII

MAN IN RELATION TO VALUES

The Vietnamese value system is based on four basic factors: allegiance to the family, yearning for a good name, love of learning, and respect for other people. These factors are closely interrelated.

ALLEGIANCE TO THE FAMILY

The most important factor in the value system of the Vietnamese is, no doubt, the family. As discussed in Chapter III, the family is the center of the Vietnamese common man's preoccupation and the backbone of Vietnamese society. By virtue of the principle of collective and mutual responsibility, each individual will strive to be a pride of his family.

A misconduct of an individual is blamed not only on himself, but also on his parents, siblings, relatives and ancestors. Likewise, any success or fame achieved by an individual will bring honor and pride to all members of his family. The Vietnamese child is taught from early childhood to readily forget himself for the sake of his family's welfare and harmony. Central to the concept of family is the obligation of filial piety (*hiếu thảo*) which is considered the most essential of all virtues in Vietnamese society. The child ought to be grateful to his parents for the debt of birth, rearing, and educating by the parents. He is taught to think of his parents and ancestors first, even at his own expense, to make sacrifices for his parents' sake, to love and care for them in their old age. The Vietnamese man who lacks filial piety is looked down upon and ostracized not only by his own family but also by the community.

The profound love for and attachment to the family is extended to the physical setting in which the family perpetuates: the native village. The dearest wish of the Vietnamese common man is, as a proverb puts it, to die in his own native village and amidst his own folk *as a leaf which leaves the branch to fall down on the ground at the foot of the tree* (*lá rụng về cội*). The native village is not only the place where he was born and brought up and where his parents and family live but also a place where his ancestors are buried. Many Vietnamese, especially people in the rural areas, never move out of their native village or province. This deep attachment to the native village explains the lack of horizontal mobility in Vietnamese society.

THE CONCEPT OF "GOOD NAME"

Another factor of importance in the value scale of the Vietnamese is the concept of "good name", or more precisely "fragrant name" (*danh thơm*), as it is said in the Vietnamese language. To the Vietnamese, a good name is better than any material possession in this world. By securing a good name for himself, a man can command respect and admiration from his fellow countrymen. A rich and powerful person with a bad reputation is looked down upon while a poor man with a good name is respected. It is believed that the best thing that a man can leave behind once he has departed from this world and by which he will be remembered is a good reputation. *After death, a tiger leaves behind his skin, a man his reputation*, says a proverb. The desire to have a good name, not only in his life time but also after death, betrays the deep aspiration of the Vietnamese to survive the disintegration of his corporeal frame after death in the memory of his progeny and community.

A man with a bad name will be despised by his fellow countrymen and become a disgrace for his family. He will lose face, which is a terrible thing in an immobile society where almost everybody knows anybody else in the community. To acquire a good name, a man must avoid all words and actions which may damage his dignity and honor. There are three ways by which he can acquire a good name: either by heroic deeds, or by intellectual achievements or by moral virtues. Leading a virtuous life is the easiest and surest path to a good name for there are few opportunities in our everyday life to be heroic and few people are endowed with exceptional intellectual qualities. The virtues most cultivated are the sense of honor, honesty, righteousness modesty, generosity and disdain for material gains, virtues most extolled by the Confucian doctrine. In view of the strong solidarity of the Vietnamese family, it is not surprising to know that the Vietnamese strives for a good name not only for himself but also for his parents and children.

LOVE OF LEARNING

The Vietnamese common man seems to have a great love for knowledge and learning. He seems to have particular respect and admiration for learned people. Like the virtuous man, the learned man enjoys great prestige in Vietnamese society. Often, they are the one and same man. The Vietnamese conceives that knowledge and virtues are but the two complementary aspects of the ideal man.

People associated with knowledge and learning such as scholars, writers, and teachers have been highly respected, not only by the students but also by parents and people from all walks of life. Learning is considered more valuable than wealth and material success. Rich people who are not educated are often looked down upon by other people and they themselves feel inferior to learned people who are poor. In the traditional social system, the scholar ranked first, before the farmer, artisan, and tradesman. Even nowadays, the learned man is held in high esteem and respect.

The love of learning does not spring from purely disinterested motives. The lure of prestige and the prospect of improved social status are among the strongest incentives to the pursuit of knowledge. Education represents the essential stepping-stones to the social ladder and good job opportunities. It is the prime motive for vertical mobility in Vietnamese society.

THE CONCEPT OF RESPECT

The Vietnamese common man is expected to show respect to people who are senior to him in age, status, or position. At home, he should show respect to his parents, older siblings, and older relatives. This is expressed by obedience in words and action. Respect is part of the concept of filial piety.

Outside the family, respect should be paid to elderly people, teachers, clergymen, supervisors and employers, and people in high positions. Learned and virtuous people enjoy special respect and admiration. But respect is not a one-way behavior. The Vietnamese common man also expects other people to show respect to him, by virtue of his age, status, or position. Special respect is gained by leading a virtuous life, by accomplishing certain heroic deeds or by achieving a high degree of intellectuality.

Respect is expressed by specific behavior patterns and by definite linguistic devices[7] inherent in the Vietnamese language. It is one of the essential factors in the value system of the Vietnamese people.

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[7] See Chapter IV.

Chapter IX

MAN IN RELATION TO VALUES: EDUCATION SYSTEM

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the French domination in the second half of the 19th century, education in Vietnam was deeply influenced by Chinese culture. The government did not finance or supervise the education of the people, it only controlled the competitive examinations for the recruitment of officials. Instruction was given in the home of scholar teachers, in the pagodas by Buddhist monks or in the home of the students by private tutors. The program of study included Chinese language and literature, Confucian classics, history and military tactics. The medium of instruction was Chinese and textbooks were written in Chinese characters. Formal training was sanctioned by a series of rigorous competitive examinations organized by the government. Candidates were examined first in their provinces. If they succeeded, they would be examined in the Capital, at Hue. These examinations took place every three years. Those who passed the examinations became government officials.

Under the French rule, education in Vietnam underwent a drastic change. The introduction of Western learning and the abolition of the classical examinations in 1918 brought about the decline of education based on Chinese language and Confucian classics. In 1917 the French established a standard system of French education in Indochina, providing for a uniform syllabus for all schools. The medium of instruction was French, starting from the second grade. Elementary education covered a period of six years at the end of which the students had to pass an examination for the Certificate of Primary Studies. Secondary education covered a period of seven years at the end of which the students had to pass the Baccalaureate (both parts I and II) to graduate. Higher education was provided by the University of Hanoi, established in 1917. The teaching staff was entirely French, the curriculum was the same as that adopted in French Universities.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

With the downfall of the French colonial rule in March 1945 and the establishment of the first Vietnamese national government headed by Trần Trọng Kim, education in Vietnam took a new shape. Although the school system was still basically patterned after the French system, the medium of instruction was, for the first time, the Vietnamese language and the curriculum was adapted to the needs of a new nation. After the Geneva Agreement in 1954, two different systems of education were adopted in the two parts of Vietnam. In the North, education was patterned after Marxist model with emphasis on political indoctrination. In the South, education was patterned after the humanist model of the Western world with concern for the full development of the individual. Since the Communist take-over of South Vietnam, the educational system of the reunified Vietnam has been organized according to the Marxist doctrine which laid more emphasis on political indoctrination than on academic or vocational subjects.

Prior to May 1975, education in South Vietnam was highly centralized. All levels and aspects of education were under the control of the Ministry of Education which assumed different names under different administrations such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Culture, Education and Youth, the Ministry of Education and Youth, and the Ministry of National Education. Curricula, subjects taught and their contents, student assessment and placement, teacher preparation and recruitment, school budgets, all those things were planned and controlled by the Ministry of Education. The program of study was uniform throughout the country for all schools, both public and private.

The educational system of South Vietnam consisted of three levels: elementary, secondary, and higher education.

Elementary education

It consisted of five years of schooling. It was free and compulsory but compulsory education was enforced loosely even in those areas where facilities were available. The curriculum of elementary schools emphasized the Vietnamese language, national history, geography and civics for the early grades. For the upper grades, additional subjects included moral education, general science and arithmetics. Prior to 1960, elementary school students had to take a graduation examination leading to the Certificate of Primary Studies.

Secondary education

It consisted of 7 years of schooling with two levels: the first level which required four years, from grade 6 through grade 9, and the second level which required three years, from grade 10 through grade 12. The first level of secondary education provided students with general knowledge while the second level provided them with more specialized learning. In order to enter the 6th grade, students must pass a competitive entrance examination.

Prior to 1960, a student who had completed the first level of secondary education must pass an examination for the Certificate of Trung-Học Đệ Nhất Cấp (Secondary education, first cycle) which was required for proceeding to the second level. Until 1972, a student who had completed the grade 11 was required to pass a national examination for the Certificate of Tú-Tài Phần I (Baccalaureate, Part I) in order to enter grade 12.

At the end of grade 12, students had to take the graduation examination of Tú-Tài Toàn Phần (Baccalaureate, part II). This examination was organized on the same days throughout the country. It was held twice a year, in May and July. The Tú Tài diploma was evidence that the student had graduated from the secondary school. It was also a requirement to enter the university.

The student who entered secondary education had four options to choose from: general or academic schools, technical and vocational schools, agricultural schools and comprehensive schools.

General Education schools

The program in this type of school was essentially academic. It prepared the students for colleges and universities. The majority of students enrolled in this type of school. In the first four years (first cycle), the school offered a common core of general knowledge essential for the student to go into specialized studies in the last three years. There was one foreign language required at this level. In the last three years (second cycle) the students had to choose one of the four following tracks:

Section A (Experimental Science Section) with emphasis on natural science, physics and chemistry.

Section B (Mathematics Section) with emphasis on mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

Section C (Modern Languages) with emphasis on literature, foreign languages and philosophy.

Section D (Classical Languages) with emphasis on literature, classical languages (Latin or Chinese characters), and philosophy.

Whatever track the student may choose, he had to take two foreign languages in the second cycle of the secondary education (See Appendix 8, for required subjects for secondary school students).

All the prescribed courses for each track are required and there were no electives in this system of education.

Technical and Vocational schools

It consisted of five grades, from grade 8 to 12. With the 1973 reform, technical and vocational schools started with grade 10, that is the second cycle of secondary education. At the end of grade 12, students had to take the Baccalaureate examination (Technical section) to graduate.

Agricutural Schools

It also consisted of five grades, from grade 8 to grade 12. With the 1973 reform, agricultural schools started with grade 10.

Comprehensive Schools

The comprehensive school was officially introduced by the Ministry of Education in 1972. Besides the four sections of the college preparatory program of the general education school, the comprehensive high school offered four vocational majors: Home Economics, Business Education, Industrial Arts and Agriculture[8].

Besides public schools, there were also private schools for elementary and secondary education. Private schools were also controlled and supervised by the Ministry of Education and had to follow the same curriculum as public schools. Generally speaking, the quality of private schools was lower than that of public schools.

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8 For a comprehensive description of the secondary education curriculum, see "*Translation of the Republic of Vietnam's Curriculum of Secondary Comprehensive Education*", California State Department of Education, 1977.

Higher education

To be admitted to higher education, a student must have a "baccalaureate" diploma. Some colleges required students to pass a competitive entrance examination for admission. Higher education in state universities was free.

There were two types of higher education: Junior College and University.

Junior College

This type of higher education was of recent date. The following Junior Colleges were set up in the 1970's:

- The Duyền Hải Junior College at Nha Trang (1973) which specialized in fisheries and oceanography.
- The Tiền-Giang Junior College at Mỹ-Tho (1973) which specialized in agriculture and animal husbandry.
- The Quảng-Đà Junior College at Đà-Nẵng (1974) which specialized in business and mechanics.
- The Qui-Nhơn Junior College at Qui-Nhơn (1975) which specialized in agriculture and industrial arts.

Universities

This is the traditional type of higher education in Vietnam. Each university consisted of several faculties. Universities are administered by a Rector appointed by the Chief of State. Under the Rector were the Deans of the faculties who were also members of the teaching staff. A considerable degree of autonomy was accorded to the respective faculties.

The duration of the course of study varied from faculty to faculty. The courses in the Faculties of Letters, Law, and Pedagogy covered four years. Examinations were given at the end of each year and certificates were awarded to successful students. After successful completion of four years' work, evidenced by the number of required Certificates obtained, the student earned the degree of Cử-Nhân (B.A.). The diploma of Cao-Học (M.A.) required at least one year after the B.A. and the Tiến-Sĩ (Doctorate) required 2 or 3 years of additional work and the completion of a dissertation. The courses in Medicine covers seven years' work (for the M.D.), in Architecture six years and Pharmacy and Dentistry 5 years.

In 1975 there were four State Universities: University of Saigon, University of Huế, University of Cần-Thơ and the Thủ-

Đức Polytechnic University. Beside colleges and universities, post-secondary education was also offered in "Institutes" and "National Schools" such as the National Institute of Administration, the National School of Fine Arts, the National Institute of Oceanography, the National Schools of Music and Drama at Hue and Saigon etc... These institutions of higher education were also controlled by the Ministry of Education.

There were ten private institutions of higher education the majority of which were affiliated to a church or religious sect[9].

Teacher education was provided by two different types of institutions. Normal schools prepared elementary school teachers with a two-year program. There were fifteen normal schools in Saigon and in some large cities. The Faculties of Pedagogy of the Universities of Saigon, Hue, and Can-tho were in charge of the training of the secondary school teachers. They offered a two-year program for junior-high school teachers and four-year program for senior-high school teachers. In order to be admitted into those programs the students must possess the Baccalaureate and pass a highly competitive entrance examination. After graduation, they would be appointed full-time teachers by the Ministry of Education and assigned to schools in various parts of the country.

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[9] Seven private colleges and universities were affiliated to a church or religious sect:

- Dalat University, 1958 (Roman Catholic), specializing in teacher education.
- Vạn Hạnh University in Saigon, 1964 (Buddhist), with emphasis on Eastern philosophy and studies of Sanskrit.
- Minh Đức University in Saigon, 1970 (Roman Catholic) with a well equipped Medical School.
- Cao Đài University at Tây Ninh, 1971 (Cao Đài).
- Hỏa Hảo University at Long Xuyen, 1972 (Hỏa Hao).
- Regina Pacis College in Saigon, 1972 (Roman Catholic), a college of liberal arts and business for girls.
- Lasan University in Saigon, 1974 (Christian Brothers), specializing in technology.

In addition, there were 3 other private lay institutions in Saigon of recent creation:

- Thành Nhân Teacher Training Institute (1970).
- Cửu Long University (1973), specializing in mass media and business.
- Tri Hành College of Business and Management (1974).

Appendix 8

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION (HOURS PER WEEK)

SUBJECT	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	G 5
1. Vietnamese Language					
a. Vocabulary & Reading	5.5	3.6	3.6	3.75	3.75
b. Recitation	1	1	1.5	.50	.50
c. Penmanship	2.5	1	1	.50	.50
d. Dictation/Grammar	.50	1.33	1.5	1.75	1.75
e. Composition		1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50
2. Moral Ed.& Civics	2.12	2.12	2.60	2.50	2.50
3. History			1	1	1
4. Geography			1	1	1
5. Math	2.5	3	3	3.90	3.90
6. Drawing	1.60	.90	.90	.90	.90
7. Home Economics (girls only)				1.90	1.90
8. Activities	1	1	2	2	2
9. Science	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50
10. Physical Ed	1.60	1.60	1.60	2	2
11. Child Care (girls only)				.50	.50

Appendix 9

SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM FIRST CYCLE (HOURS PER WEEK)

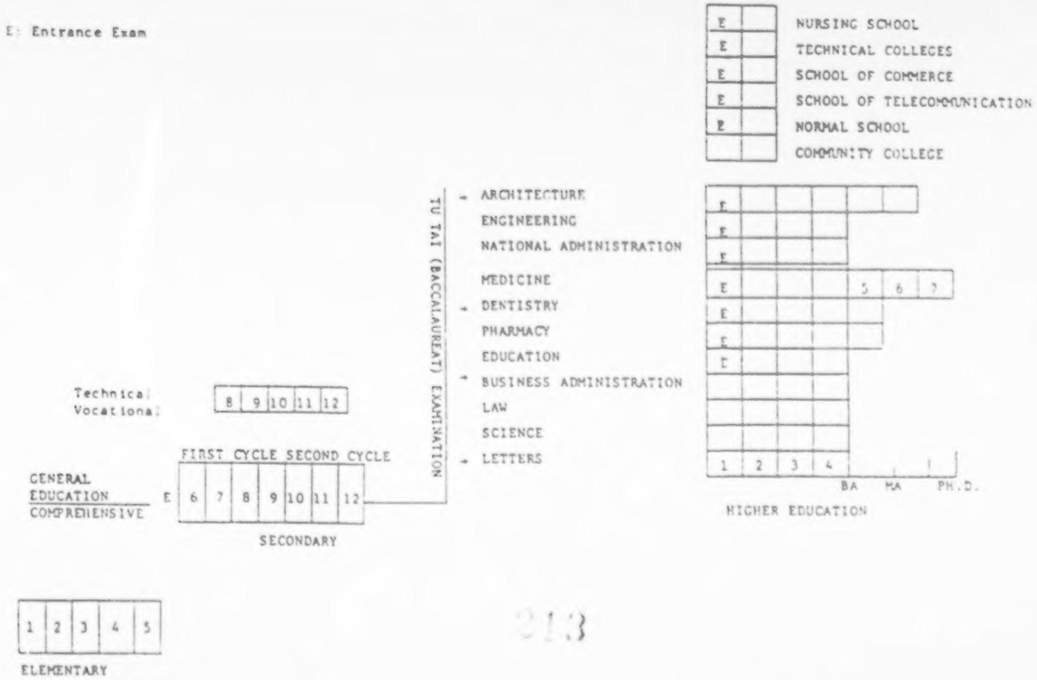
SUBJECT	Gr 6	Gr 7	Gr 8	Gr 9
Vietnamese	6	6	6	6
History	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Geography	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Civics	1	1	1	2
Modern Language (French or English)	6	6	5	5
Mathematics	3	3	3.5	3.5
Natural Science	1	1.5	1.5	2
Physics	1	1	1.5	1.5
Chemistry	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	22	22.5	22.5	24
Physical Education and Youth Activities	3	3	3	3
Handicraft (for boys)	1	1	1	1
Home Economics (for girls)	1	1	1	1
Music	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	28	28.5	28.5	30

Appendix 10

SECONDARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM SECOND CYCLE (HOURS PER WEEK)

REQ'D SUBJ	Gr 10	Gr 11	Gr 12	Sections
Vietnamese	5	4	2	A,B
	5	6	3	C,D
History - Geography	3	3	2	A,B
	3	3	3	C,D
Civics	2	2	1	A,B,C,D
Philosophy	0	0	3	B
	0	0	4	A
	0	0	8	C,D
Modern Language I	4	4	3	A,B
	6	6	6	C,D
Modern Language II	0	0	0	D
	4	4	3	A,B
	6	6	4	C
Classical Language (Latin or Chinese)	0	0	0	A,B,C
	6	6	4	D
Physics	.5	.5	.5	C,D
	3	3	5	A,B
Chemistry	.5	.5	.5	C,D
	1.5	1.5	2	A,B
Mathematics	1	1	1	C,D
	4	4	4	A
	6	6	8	B
Natural Science	1	1	1	B,C,D
	3	3	4	A
TOTAL (Min Max)	25-27.5	26-28.5	28-30	
ELECTIVES				
Boys	2	2	2	
Girls	3	3	3	

SCHOOL SYSTEM IN VIETNAM (PRIOR TO MAY 1975)


E: Entrance Exam
NURSING SCHOOL
TECHNICAL COLLEGES
SCHOOL OF COMMERCE
SCHOOL OF TELECOMMUNICATION
NORMAL SCHOOL
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
E
TU TAI (BACCALAUREAT) EXAMINATION
ARCHITECTURE
ENGINEERING
NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
MEDICINE
DENTISTRY
PHARMACY
EDUCATION
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
LAW
SCIENCE
LETTERS
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
BA
MA
PH.D.
HIGHER EDUCATION
Technical
Vocational
8 9 10 11 12
FIRST CYCLE
SECOND CYCLE
GENERAL EDUCATION
COMPREHENSIVE
6 7 8 9 10 11 12
SECONDARY
1 2 3 4 5
ELEMENTARY

Chapter X

MAN FACING HIS DESTINY: RELIGION IN VIETNAM

Religion has exerted a deep influence on Vietnamese culture and the Vietnamese concept of life. As we will see in the next chapter, the Vietnamese attitude towards life, death, and the world beyond bears a deep imprint of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

BUDDHISM

The predominant religion in Vietnam is Buddhism, which is also one of the world's great religions. Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam under the Chinese domination, in the second century B.C., by Chinese immigrants and by Indian preachers coming by sea. It became the state religion of Vietnam under the Lý dynasty (1010-1214). Several kings took the cassock or retired into a pagoda after their abdication. Buddhist monks served as counselors to the king at court. Since the Trần Dynasty (1225-1440), Buddhism has lost the status of a state religion but nevertheless remained the dominant religion in Vietnam.

Buddhism was originated in India by Shiddharta (563-483 B.C.) or Gautama Buddha, which means the Enlighted One. According to Buddha, *man was born in this world to suffer*. The cause of suffering is the craving for wealth, fame, and power which necessarily brings about frustration and disappointment. In order to be free from suffering, man must suppress its ultimate cause: craving. He must not be attached to anything in this "world of appearance" and live a virtuous life according to the Eightfold Path which consists of the *right views, right thought, right conduct, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation.* An individual's fate in this existence is determined by what he did in the previous existence. This is the law of *Karma*, or cause and effect.

The soul does not perish when one dies, but will reincarnate in another existence and this will go on and on. The Buddhist's goal is to be freed from this circle of reincarnation and reach *Nirvana*, which is a state of complete redemption and supreme happiness. Theoretically, any person may become a Buddha by suppressing craving and following the Eightfold Path but those who actually attain Buddhahood are rare.

There are two branches of Buddhism: Hinayana (Little Vehicle), also called Theravada, which flourishes in Ceylon and Southern Asia, and Mahayana (Great Vehicle) which flourishes in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Most Vietnamese Buddhists belong to the Mahayana branch. The Theravada branch is made of ethnic Cambodians and Vietnamese living in the Mekong Delta. The great majority of Vietnamese people regard themselves as Buddhists but not all of them actively participate in Buddhist rituals at the pagoda. For centuries, the Buddhist clergy had not been organized into a hierarchic system. Each pagoda was completely autonomous of others and was entirely administered by local individuals or community. The first attempt to organize Buddhism on a national scale was achieved by the General Buddhist Association in 1955. Further efforts culminated in the establishment of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam in 1964.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is more of a religious and social philosophy than a religion in the accepted meaning of the word. It has no church, no clergy, and no Bible. It advocates a code of social behavior that man ought to observe so as to live in harmony in society and attain happiness in his individual life. There is little concern about death, the world beyond, and mystic feelings in this religion.

Confucius, or Kung Fu-tzo (551-479 B.C.), the founder of this religion, stressed the improvement of the moral self as the basic duty of the individual as well as the statesman. In order to *rule the world, one must rule one's country; in order to rule the country, one must rule one's family; and in order to rule the family, one must have control of oneself.* Consequently, the improvement of the moral self is the cornerstone of Confucianism. Confucius believes that man is born with an essentially good nature which becomes corrupted in his contact with society. In order to improve his moral self and regain that original good nature with which he was born, man must practice the five cardinal virtues of benevolence (仁); propriety (禮); loyalty (義); intellect (智) and trustworthiness (信). In order to keep harmony in the nation and happiness in the family, man must observe the three basic relationships of sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife. On the national level the basic virtue is loyalty to the sovereign, on the family level, the basic virtue is filial piety. The ritual expression of filial piety is ancestor worship.

Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam as early as the first century, during the Chinese domination. Two Chinese governors at that time, Hsi Kwang and Jen Yen, were most instrumental in its introduction. It was after Vietnam reconquered independence that Chinese influence and Confucianism became important in Vietnam. Because of its political philosophy which was favorable for the monarchy, Confucianism was promoted and supported by the government. In 1253 the Institute for National Studies (Quốc-Học Viện) was founded by the King to teach the classical books of Confucius. Under the Lê Dynasty, studies of the Confucian doctrine attained their climax. With the French conquest and the influence of Western philosophies, Confucianism was on the decline. However, it still pervades the thinking and behavior of Vietnamese people from all walks of life.

TAOISM

Another religion which has a deep imprint on the way of life of the Vietnamese is Taoism. Lao Tse (600-500 B.C.), the founder of Taoism, advocated a philosophy of harmony between man and man and between man and nature. To achieve this state of harmony, all forms of confrontation should be avoided. The virtues of simplicity, patience, and self-contentment must be observed. By non-action and keeping away from human strife and cravings, man can reach harmony with himself, other people, and the universe. Reason and knowledge cannot lead man to the right path (Tao) which can be reached only by inward probing and quiet meditation.

In essence, Taoism was a religious philosophy. However, the followers of Lao Tse transformed it into a religion with a church and a clergy involved in the communication with deities, spirits and the dead. Taoist clergymen claimed they could cure illness, alleviate misfortune, and predict the future.

Taoism was introduced into Vietnam during the Chinese domination period. By the time Vietnam recovered its independence, it had become one of the main religious faiths of the Vietnamese people. Under King Lý Nhân-Tôn (1072-1127), the examination for the recruitment of officials consisted of essays on the "three religions". Under the succeeding dynasties, Taoism became a source of inspiration for poets and writers of Vietnam. From the end of the Trần dynasty, Taoism began to turn mainly to mysticism and polytheism. It was this mystic aspect of Taoism that appealed to the common people of Vietnam.

CHRISTIANITY

Although a main religion of the world, Christianity does not play a major role in the culture of Vietnam. It was introduced into Vietnam rather late, in the second half of the sixteenth century by European missionaries, especially Portuguese, Spanish and French. The first missionary, Ignatio, came to Vietnam in 1533. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits came to Vietnam and founded in Hội-An the Cochinchina's mission. In 1626, Alexandre de Rhodes was chosen to head the Jesuit mission in North Vietnam. He published a catechism book in Latin and Vietnamese in 1650 and the first Vietnamese, Portuguese and Latin dictionary in 1651 in Rome. Christianity began to develop rapidly. About the middle of the seventeenth century, preaching of Christianity was banned in Vietnam. Despite the proscription, Catholic missions continued to work for the evangelization of Vietnam. Under the Nguyễn dynasty, especially under Kings Minh-Mạng, Thiệu Trị, and Tù-Đức, the Christians were persecuted and labelled "perverse to the public order." Using the persecution of Christians as a pretext, the French conquered Vietnam in the second half of the nineteenth century. Under the French administration, the Catholics enjoyed the support of the government. It was during the Ngô Đình Diệm regime that the Catholics filled key positions in the government, the army, and the police. Today there are about two million Christians, most of them Catholics– out of a population of 56 million. Although they represented a small percentage of the population, the Catholics played an important role in the political life of Vietnam in the last three decades prior to the fall of Saigon in 1975.

MINOR RELIGIONS

There are two religious sects, Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo, which had recently been established in Vietnam but confined to the rural sectors of the Southern Delta region. Their influence on Vietnamese culture had been insignificant.

Caodaism is a synthesis of different beliefs including the teaching of Buddha, Jesus, Confucius, Lao-Tse, Victor Hugo, etc... It was founded in 1919 by Lê Văn Trung who established a priestly hierarchy modelled on the Roman Catholic lines. The seat of the headquarters is in Tây Ninh, about 60 miles from Saigon. The adherents to Caodaism have been estimated at about one million.

Hòa Hảo is a reformed Buddhist sect of the Theravada variety. It was founded in 1939 by Hùynh-Phú-Sổ, who later on was killed by the Communists. This religious sect is concentrated in the Mekong delta with a membership estimated at about two million.

CONCLUSION

One important feature of the religious attitude of the Vietnamese is his great tolerance. There has never been religious fanaticism or religious warfare in Vietnam. The persecution of Catholics under the reign of Tự Đức was carried out by a government which suspected the missionaries and Christian converts as spies for foreign powers. It was not carried out by believers of other religions against the Christians.

The religious belief of the common Vietnamese is a synthesis of the three traditional religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) which have been coexisting peacefully for centuries in Vietnam.

Chapter XI

MAN FACING HIS DESTINY: THE VIETNAMESE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

LIFE AND DEATH

The philosophy of life of the Vietnamese bears the deep imprint of the various religions examined in the previous chapter. The Buddhist influence can be discerned in the view of life on earth as something transient and instable. "Life is but an empty dream," and all wordly riches, honors, and positions are temporary. Fully conscious of the tragic elements in man's destiny, the Vietnamese, nevertheless, have an attitude of acceptance towards life which almost amounts to stoicism. He seems to be content with his fate, no matter how humble it may be. This attitude of self-contentment reflects the Taoist view of life.

In the view of the Vietnamese common man, life on earth is but a temporary stop on his journey to death and other reincarnations. Since death is viewed as inexorable and inherent in the human condition and regulated by the Supreme Being, the Vietnamese accepts it with composure. It was a common custom in Vietnam, especially in rural areas, for people to have a coffin ready in their houses as a preparation for death which may come ten or twenty years later. Well-to-do people used to build their own tombs long before they felt they were approaching death. This composure should not be construed as absence of sadness and regret. The Vietnamese believes that, in spite of its seamy side, life is still better than death which is shrouded in mystery. Death, for the Vietnamese, does not mean total disappearance. Only the corporeal frame is disintegrated, the spirit survives and perpetuates in a series of reincarnations. The belief in the survival of the soul forms the spiritual basis for ancestor worship while the feeling of gratitude and affection for one's forebears forms its moral foundation. The institution of ancestor worship, which bears witness to the influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture, reflects the profound desire of the Vietnamese to survive in the heart and memory of his beloved ones after he has gone to the world beyond. Ancestor worship is shared by Vietnamese people of all faiths, except perhaps the converts to Christianity. Most families have an ancestral altar placed in a prominent place in the main room of the house. The ancestral altar is set with incense burners and candle sticks together with the ancestral tablets and pictures. The head of the family is responsible for the proper veneration of the dead ancestors. On the anniversary of death of each ancestor, special rites are performed which consist of making sacrifice offerings, burning incense, bowing and praying before the altar. This is an occasion for members of the family, relatives, and even close friends to gather together and have good food and wine. Besides the individual anniversaries, sacrifices are offered to the ancestors on such holidays as the New Year's Day, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the All Soul's Day etc... Whenever there is an occasion of family joy or sorrow—wedding, birth, promotion or funeral—rites are performed to honor the ancestors and get them informed of the special event.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

The Vietnamese common man believes in one Supreme Being whose sovereignty extends over the entire universe. This being, the creator of all things and beings but created by no one, has no earthly origin or connection.

This Supreme Being, called Trời (Heaven), governs the universe and directs all his affairs with absolute wisdom. Although nobody can see him, he sees everything and knows everything. Nobody can deceive him or conceal anything from him. He sees both the visible and the invisible; he knows the past as well as the future.

As the creator of man and nature, he is full of mercy for mankind and all beings created by him. He provides for each one to have his share of food and happiness. As the judge of the universe, he rewards virtues and punishes sins according to his laws of justice. He stretches forth his hands and assists the good in moments of difficulty or danger. He punishes the wicked with miserly and misfortune. One may sometimes escape the punishment of the law or the condemnation of public opinion but one can never escape the fair judgment of Heaven. Heaven is a moral God standing on the side of truth and justice.

The belief in Heaven as an omniscient, omnipotent, and just God does not preclude the importance of man's freedom and responsibility. In the last analysis, man remains the actual author of his own happiness and misfortune. Heaven is only a judge who rewards or punishes man according to his deeds. Therefore, the right way by which one can achieve happiness and peace in this life is to follow Heaven's voice and teaching.

THE NOTION OF FATE

The Vietnamese seem to believe that there is an element of fate in man's life which may help or hinder the individual's effort. Marriage, wealth, position all are predestined. However, the Vietnamese does not view fate as a blind force striking mankind indiscriminately, but as the expression of the will of Heaven (*Trời*), the omniscient, merciful, and just God. Our fate in this life is but a consequence of our deeds and our forebears' deeds in the previous existence. The Vietnamese concept of fate is a happy blending of the Confucian concept of Heaven's decree and the Buddhist theory of Karma.

In the Vietnamese mind, fate does not preclude man's efforts and will. Misfortune and happiness are not eternal. The man who has an unfavorable fate can, by his endeavor, perseverance, and good deeds bring about change and obtain reward from Heaven. On the other hand, the man with a favorable fate will prepare his own downfall by living an unworthy life. Heaven's justice is epitomized in the principle of cause and effect. Happiness or suffering results from one's own deeds, will, and endeavor.

SUPERSTITIONS

The Vietnamese common man, especially when he is uneducated, tends to believe in omens, ghosts and supernatural influences. Whatever their professed religions, most Vietnamese are influenced at one time or another in their life by magic, fortune-telling, and horoscopes. It is commonly believed that a man's destiny is determined by the positioning of a particular star in the heavens on his birth date. By consulting his horoscope, a man can avoid disaster during inauspicious periods and make the most of auspicious periods. It was usual for Vietnamese people to consult an astrologer when they had to choose a date for wedding or funeral ceremonies or for taking up a business. On special days of the month, one must avoid doing certain things lest one should meet with failure or accidents. Although the reaction against irrational thinking and superstitious practices is strong, superstition seems to exert a strong influence on the mind of the Vietnamese common people.

Appendix 12

THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

By Phạm Qùynh

Humanity is made up more of the dead than the living, Auguste Comte has said. This remark of the French positivist philosopher is still truer in the country of Vietnam than anywhere else. The Cult of the Ancestors, indeed, holds an important place in our family and social life. It was set up as a sort of religious dogma and, in a certain sense, as a true national religion. If the religion is, as its etymology indicates, the spiritual bond which unites man to supernatural forces, the cult or the religion of the dead is the demonstration of the relations which exist between the world of the living and that of the dead. The relations are numerous and continuing. The dead intervene at every moment in the life of the living; the souls guide them, direct them, protect them, assist them, inspire their thoughts and their conduct, follow them, so to speak, with their eyes, their invisible eyes which cut through the secrets of life and of death and which are perhaps the sole means by which humanity could have some brief vision of its future and its destiny; in short, the souls live in their memory, in their interest, in their dreams of life still more intense than their earthly life.

What is the nature of these relations between the living and the dead which make up one of the most vital factors in the Vietnamese religion? On the basis of what belief does this religion of the dead stand? What are its ritual and, so to speak, practical demonstration? What is the moral and philosophical lesson one may derive from them?

Confucius, who is at one and the same time the Socrates, the Solon and the Lycurgus of the Oriental city, speaks often of the spirits and the souls of the dead. It is true that in his *Philosophical Conversations* with his disciples, he declines sometimes to give his own views as to their compositions; one knows the response which he made to one of them who queried him on the subject: *You do not know how to serve the living, why should I teach you to serve the dead? You who understand nothing of life, why should I speak to you about death?* But we know, in another connection, that in this matter, the master remained faithful to the beliefs of ancient China, traces of which are notably kept for us in *The Book of Rites.* According to these beliefs, man is made up of the living soul and the spiritual soul. After death, the living soul turns to dust with the body. The spiritual soul rises, wanders in space and leads an independent, ethereal, airy life. This is the life of the spirits, of the souls, of the departed ancestors. These then never die completely; they follow a transcendent, spiritual life. But this life which runs the risk of becoming ineffectual, of evaporating into nothing, is made more real, more effective, so to say, by the memory the living keep of the dead, by the cult which it is their duty to offer. It is thus that the dead may always participate in the life of their family, of their descendents. One calls on them for all solemn occasions, such as births, marriages and so on.

The cult of the souls of the departed ancestors dates back to early antiquity. Confucius reports in the *Luận-Ngữ* that Emperor Vu, one of the first semi-fictional, semi-historical rulers of China, so restrained in his personal wants, was extremely liberal when he made the offering to the souls. *In the spring and in the autumn,* says Confucius, in the *Trung Dung, the ancients decorate the temple of their ancestors. They put on display the utensils which the departed had used, and the clothes which they had worn. They offered them the freshly prepared dishes and fruits in season.*

I said earlier that Confucius remained faithful to this ancient religion, to these old beliefs of ancient China, all the more since they fit in admirably with his doctrine of social conservatism based on the cult of the past and of tradition.

But did he himself believe in the existence of the souls? Did he believe in their real presence in the ceremonies and the invocations? From what emanates from his words, always prudently chosen when he concerns himself with such questions of a metaphysical order, doubt is allowable.

We have seen the answer that he made to one of his disciples on death. Here is what he said to another who questioned him on discretion: *To fulfil the duties appertaining to man, to honor the spirits, but to hold one's distance, that could be called discretion.*

To honor the spirits, but to hold oneself at a distance, that is the attitude of the sage in regard to divinity.

It is possible that the souls and the spirits exist; it is probable that they do not exist. One thing is certain, that is, we should honor them. Let us do it in all sincerity, without superstition and fanaticism, as we perform a ritual of high moral and social importance.

This ritual, in fact, is demanded by filial piety, which in the politico-moral system of Confucius, is the basic of all virtues, the foundation of family morals, and consequently of society and of the empire.

Under these conditions, how is it necessary to honor the dead, and of all the dead, those which concern us most directly, our ancestors?

The *Book of Rites* credited Confucius with this saying: *To treat the dead as dead would be unhuman. One must not do it. But to treat them as living would be foolish. One must not do it.* One is not then to treat the dead as dead, that is to say to concern oneself no more with them, to forget them; one is not to treat them as living either, that is to say, to believe that they really live. In fact, they do live in our memory, by the liveness, the intensity of the sentiment that is called filial piety and which leads to the worship of those to whom one owes one's life and one's conscience, to carry on, to perpetuate their memory, to pass on the colt indefinitely to our descendents, giving us the illusion, a salutary illusion, of the continuity, perenniality and immortality, of this phantom existence, in this passing world.

Here is how the intimate thought of the master should be interpreted. Respectful of tradition and of rituals, he did not wish to explain himself fully on this subject. But such should be his thought. The cult of the dead is, in his eyes, the cult of memory, based upon filial piety and the thought of the continuity of the family and of the race. And it is in this spirit that it is still being practiced by the majority of the Oriental world, for whom it is the main religion and takes the place of all preachings revealed or supernatural.

This cult is surrounded with the practice of different rituals that it would be idle to enumerate here. One knows, besides, that each Vietnamese family, rich or poor, has an altar for the ancestors which could be a magnificent place of worship, or a simple dais stand on two saw-horses. It is there that the funerary tablets of all the deceased ancestors dating back five generations repose. These are the object of particular ceremonies on the days in memory of the date of their death and of all the ritual fetes of the year. The others, the remote ancestors are represented on a communal tablet and receive worship on definite ritual days which are also numerous during the year. Two days are especially dedicated to the dead: the 9th day of the third month (*Thanh Minh*), that is the day for visiting the tombs; this day of the dead has nothing gloomy about it and takes place at one of the prettiest times of the year when:

> *"The new grass stretching out to the vast horizon.*
> *Tne pear-tree branch grows white with its tender fleece..."*

Thus it is said in the well-known poem of Kiều.

To this day of the dead, called the weed-digging of the tombs, is added ordinarily a day of the living, for the idea of death, and it is something to note, has nothing gloomy about it in this country.

The second day reserved for the dead is the 15th day of the 7th month. This is rather a Buddhist festival, dedicated to the wandering souls, to all those who died without descendents to keep their cult alive. For the greatest misfortune which could happen to a man, is to see one day his cult broken, by posterity's default, and to become thus a wandering soul to whom Buddhist charity grants an impersonal and anonymous cult.

Thus the persons who died without direct male descendents to continue their cult are authorized by Vietnamese law to choose in their close kinship what one calls, a founded cult. One can see by this how much the idea of the cult is long-lived in the hearts of the Vietnamese. The cult of the dead is essentially a cult of ancestors.

Confucius said: *To make offerings to the souls who are not of your own family, is rank flattery.*

Each individual, each family ought to make offerings to his own ancestors, not to the others. If someone makes the offerings to the souls who are not his, it is evidently done to obtain a favor, to which one is not entitled: illegal seizure of good fortune. (Wieger).

Then, in principle, each one has only the cult to offer to his own dead ancestors. But there are those men, who during their lifetime, have granted many favors to their fellow citizens, who have been the benefactors of their village, of their province, of the entire country; there are the rulers and the ministers who have been the architects of national grandeur; the generals who have saved the country from foreign invasion; the great scholars who have honored the nation by their intelligence and their talents; the men and women who died to save honor and virtue; these have the right to let their fellow citizens perpetuate their memory and to worship them. It is thus that the villages respect them as their guardian spirits; that their original province, that the whole country build temples at places their memory has made famous. This is equally a form of the cult of ancestors; not only the common ancestors of a village, of a city, of the nation. It is the cult of the protecting spirits of the country and it is already, in a certain sense, the cult of great men, of heroes so praised by Carlyle.

Here is the cult of the dead as it is understood and practised in this land of Vietnam.

Being given its main importance in the constitution of the family and of the Vietnamese city, and the detailed and complicated rituals which surround it, it constitutes a true religion, the religion of the family and of the race, a religion of memory and of gratitude. It is, certainly, a national religion, logical, consistent with reason and with sentiment, carrying a minimum of mysticism to satisfy the religious souls and a maximum of reason to content all the positive souls. It is a philosophical religion and the Vietnamese people are honored to have always practised it, for bygone centuries.

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Chapter XII

MAN'S EXPRESSION ABOUT HIS RELATIONS TO HIMSELF AND TO OUTER WORLD

The Vietnamese common man's perception of his relations with himself, other people, and nature is often reflected in his everyday language. In the foregoing chapters, we witnessed some linguistic illustrations of the Vietnamese concept of the family, society, values, and philosophy of life. This perception is more directly expressed in literature, music and theater.

LITERATURE

Oral Literature

Vietnam has a long tradition of literature. As with any other nation in the world, this tradition started with folk literature handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Oral literature consists of proverbs, folk ballads and folk tales which express the feelings, emotions, hopes, aspirations and world view of the Vietnamese common man. It is not possible to identify the authors of those literary products which were undoubtedly composed by some individuals but repolished by the community through the process of oral transmission, due to creative urge or adaptive needs. Wandering minstrels who earned their living by singing folk ballads and folk tales, oarsmen and boat girls who sang folk lyrics in the moonlight, farmers who exchanged folk songs while working in the rice fields, all those people helped keep folk literature alive.

Written literature

Written literature consists of two kinds: literature composed in Chinese and literature composed in Vietnamese.

Literature in Chinese

The first written literary products of Vietnam were in Chinese and dated back to the Chinese domination period. Since there was no writing system to record the Vietnamese language all written literature had to be composed and recorded in Chinese characters. This type of literature started during the Chinese domination period, prospered during the Independence Era and lasted until the end of the nineteenth century.

Under the national dynasties, the climate was favorable for the development of literature. Writers and poets were held in high regards. The kings were the main patrons of literature. Under the Lý and Trần dynasties (11th-14th centuries), several poems were composed by Buddhist monks and court officials. Most prominent among the latter were Lý-Thường-Kiệt and Trần-Quốc-Tuấn, the national heroes who defeated the Chinese invading armies in the 11th and 13th centuries. Such emperors as Lý Thái Tông and Lý Nhân Tông were also famous for their poetical works.

It was under the Trần dynasty that the first history of Vietnam, *Đại Việt Sử Ký* was written by Lê-Văn-Hưu.

Literature attained a high degree of development under the Lê dynasty. King Lê-Thánh-Tôn (1460-1497) established a literary circle called Tao-Đàn, which he compared to a constellation of twenty-eight stars. Among the most prominent poets of the time were Nguyễn-Trãi (1380-1442), who was also remembered as the author of the famous *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* ("Proclamation on the Victory over the Chinese Invasion Troops"); and Nguyễn-Bỉnh-Khiêm (1541-1585) often considered as the Nostradamus of the East. Đặng-Trần-Côn (1710-1745) wrote a long lyric poem, *Chinh Phụ Ngâm* ("A Plaintive Ballad of a Warrior's Wife"), which depicted the sorrows and anguish of a young beautiful wife who was waiting for the return of her husband who had gone to war and was never to return. In prose, Ngô-Si-Liên wrote a comprehensive history of Vietnam, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* and Nguyễn Du wrote *Truyền Kỳ Mạn Lục*, a collection of marvelous tales which reflect the life in Vietnam in a troubled period of civil strife. Lê-Qui-Đôn (1726-1784) left many masterpieces, both in prose and poetry, such as the history book *Đại Việt Thông Sử* and the collection of poems *Quế Đường Thi Tập*.

It was under the Nguyễn dynasty that Vietnamese literature in Chinese reached its apogee with such works as the history books *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* and *Khâm Định Việt Sử* and such collections of poems as *Cao Chu Tần Thi Tập* by Cao Bá Quát, *Thảo Đường Thi Tập* by Phạm Quý Thích and *Bắc Hành Thi Tập* by Nguyễn Du. The Nguyên dynasty also witnessed the decline and death of literature written in Chinese and the study of Chinese characters and Chinese classics in Vietnam.

Literature in Vietnamese

Based on the writing system used to record literary works, we distinguish two categories: literature written in "Chữ-nôm" or the demotic script based on Chinese characters and literature written in *Quốc Ngữ*, or the roman alphabet.

Literature in Chữ-Nôm

The need of a writing system to represent the Vietnamese language led to the creation of *Chữ-nôm*, the demotic writing system based on Chinese characters (see Chapter V). It is not possible to tell when and by whom *Chữ-nôm* was created. It is believed that this system of writing was used as early as the Chinese Domination period. However, the earliest written document in *chữ-nôm* extant came from a 13th century writer, Nguyễn Thuyên, who wrote the *Văn Tế Cá Sấu* ("Orison for the Crocodiles"). Among the pioneers in the *Chữ-nôm* literature were Nguyễn Sĩ Cố and Chu Văn An in the 14th century.

This kind of literature reached its zenith during the 16th - 19th centuries. Phan Huy Ích and Đoàn Thị Điểm adapted *Chinh Phụ Ngâm* written in Chinese by Đặng Trần Côn into a Vietnamese ballad noted for its musicality and great sensitivity. Nguyễn Bỉnh Khiêm wrote hundreds of poems extolling the happiness of a secluded life aloof from the strife of the time. Nguyễn Gia Thiều (1741-1798) wrote *Cung Oán Ngâm Khúc* ("Plaintive Ballad of an Odalisk") which voiced the sorrows and despair of a beautiful young women condemned to waste her youth and beauty in the royal harem. Critics have agreed that the masterpiece of the literature in *Chữ-nôm* was a long narrative poem called *Kim Vân Kiều* by Nguyễn Du (1765-1820), who depicted the tragic fate of a beautiful and talented young woman named Thúy Kiêu who became the victim of an unjust and corrupted society and who had to sacrifice her love to fulfill the obligation of filial piety. *Kim Vân Kiều* has become the most popular literary work and there is no single Vietnamese who does not know this poem or who cannot recite a few passages from it. There were also several long narrative poems of value during this period, such as *Nhị Độ Mai, Phan Trần, Lục Vân Tiên, Hoa Tiên,* and *Bích Câu Kỳ Ngộ*. Mention should be made of three distinguished women poets who represented three main tendencies in Vietnamese literature of the period. Đoàn Thị Điểm, the poetess of the heart, represented the romantic trend prevailing in the works of Nguyễn Gia Thiều and Nguyễn Du. Bà Huyện Thanh Quan with her lofty and dignified style represented the classical trend and the Chinese influence in Vietnamese literature. Hô Xuân Hương with her spicy language full of "double entendre" and her discussion of taboo subjects represented the movement of social protest and satire in literature.

Literature in Quốc Ngữ

The creation of the roman alphabet to represent the Vietnamese language called *quốc-ngữ* by European missionaries in the 16th century (see Chapter V) was a great contribution to the development of Vietnamese literature written in the vernacular. During the three centuries that followed its creation, *quốc ngữ* was restricted to the small circle of clergymen who used this new writing system to translate the Bible into Vietnamese. The roman alphabet was not used by common people or poets and writers who clung to Chinese characters and the demotic system of writing. Attempts to popularize the roman alphabet took place only at the end of the 19th century. At the end of the First World War *quốc ngữ* gained the status of a national writing system.

The first newspaper printed in the roman alphabet was published in 1865 but it took fifty years for the *quốc ngữ* to become a popular medium of literary creation. Among the pioneers of literature in *quốc ngữ* were Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837–1898), Hùynh Tịnh Của (1834- 1907), Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882-1936), Phan Kế Bính (1857-1921), Nguyễn Khắc Hiếu (1889-1939) and Phạm Qùynh (1892-1945).

Vietnamese prose written in *quốc ngữ* showed two distinct tendencies: one towards didactic literature, the other towards fiction. Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, Trần Trọng Kim, Ngô Tất Tố, Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Trương Tửu, and Nguyễn Bách Khoa contributed to the elaboration and development of the scientific and philosophical thought in the vernacular. The novel reflected Vietnamese society and its problems and the impact of Western culture on Vietnamese traditional culture. In the early thirties, Nguyễn Tường Tam (pen-name Nhất Linh) founded *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn*, a literary circle which advocated in their works the individual's emancipation from traditionalism. Khái-Hưng, Thạch Lam, Hoàng Đạo, Thế Lữ were other well-known members of this literary group. *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn* was also credited with the introduction of a new style in poetry, *tho mói* or modern poetry, freed from the influence of Chinese prosody. The names of such well-known poets as Thế Lữ, Xuân Diệu, Huy Cận, Lưu Trọng Lư, Chế Lan Viên and Tú Mỡ are associated with this new style of poetry.

The period between the two World Wars witnessed the rapid growth of Vietnamese literature written in *quốc-ngữ*. Literary works, both in prose and in poetry and representing different literary trends, were published in abundance. Masterpieces of foreign literatures, especially Chinese, French and English, were translated into Vietnamese. The coming of age of Vietnamese literature in *quốc-ngữ* also brought about the end of Chinese and *chữ-nôm* as media of literary creation.

Literature in the period following the Second World War was noted for its revolutionary themes of nationalism and anticolonialism which reflected the struggle for independence of the Vietnamese people. With the Communist regime, literature and other forms of art were tightly controlled and geared towards the theory of Marxism for the service of the Communist party.

MUSIC

Music plays an important role in the life of the Vietnamese, the rich like the poor, the learned like the uneducated. It is used to lull a child to sleep, to accompany work and play, and as a component of rites and celebrations. Popular music has a rich heritage, each locality has its own characteristics. The North has such styles of music as *hát chèo, sa-mac, quan họ, trổng quân*, the Center has *nam-ai, nam-bình, and hò-mái-nhì*, and the South has *vọng-cổ* and *cải lường*. The music of the North is marked with gaiety and vivacity while the music of the Center and the South has a languishing and melancholic rhythm. Western influence is obvious in the new type of music called *tân nhạc*, or modern music, which has become very popular, especially among the younger generation.

THEATER

The theater is a popular form of art in Vietnam. It usually expresses the history, traditions, values and cultural heritage of the Vietnamese people. There are three main types of theatrical performance.

Hát bội (traditional theater) is the Vietnamese adaptation of the Chinese opera. It can be traced back to the 11th century when Chinese immigrants were hired to teach actors to play before the court. No scenery is used in this type of theater. Actors' makeup, gestures, and costume compensate for the barren stage. Usually facial make-ups identify the role of the characters. Gestures are stylized and their meaning is familiar to the audience. Plots are drawn from Vietnamese and Chinese history and used as a means for moral and social education of the common people: the wicked and disloyal are always punished and the brave and loyal always rewarded with victory and fame. Consequently, the lyrics are more important than the music in this kind of theater.

Cải lương (renovated theater) is usually a comedy of manners but the dialogue is interspersed with songs accompanied by an orchestra. This type of theater is characterized by sentimentality and realism. The characters are more human than in the *hát bội* in the sense that they are not heroes but common mortals. The superhuman element is seldom found in this type of theater. The sweetness of the performer's voice and her singing ability are more important than her acting ability.

Kịch (modern theater) is the Vietnamese adaptation of the modern French comedy. It is a play in prose discourse without any accompanying song and music. Although of a more recent origin, *kịch* has become more and more popular with the Vietnamese common man.

Literature, music, and the theater provide an excellent avenue to explore Vietnamese culture. The ways in which the Vietnamese people feel, believe, and behave are reflected in such art forms as folk tales, proverbs, folk ballads, novels, poems, popular songs and plays.

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